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MOHAMED KHEIDER UNIVERSITY-BISKRA
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DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
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**Feminist/ Womanist Aesthetics and the Quest for Selfhood in
the Black American Novel. A Special Reference to Alice
Walker's The Color Purple and Zora Neal Hurston's Their
Eyes Were Watching God**

**Memoir submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of "Magister" in American Literature**

submitted by:

**Mrs. Amri Chenini Boutheina
Hocine**

Supervised by:

Dr.Maoui

Board of Examiners:

Chair: Pr. Mohammed Yazide BENDJEDDOU (University of Annaba)

Supervisor: Pr.Hocine MAOUI (University of Annaba)

Examiner: Dr.Saleh BOUREGBI (University of Annaba)

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

Dedications

I thank Allah almighty for the strength and patience he has given me to write this mémoire.

In loving memory of my father Ammar

To the most generous and tender woman in the world, my mother Fatima Ezzahraa

To my little angel MeriemEzzahraa and my dear supportive husband Abdelhak

To my sister Chirine and my brother Yucef.

To my second half ...my friendAsmaCheriet.

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Abstract:

Written by two pillars of the American black women's tradition, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* trace the lives of two coloured women in a typically racist and sexist American society of the early 20th century. The protagonists in the two books are women who progress physically and emotionally through a shower of social paradigms. During their quest for self-knowledge and spiritual fulfilment, they clash with the belittling values that their daily circumstances impose upon them. Both novels are a kind of "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Black Woman". They depict the process of a woman's coming to consciousness, finding her voice and developing the power to lead a life on her own. This fresh and much-needed perspective was met with incomprehension by the male literary establishment in the case of Hurston. However, Walker's experiences decades later were very successful in a literary climate that changes with the tick of the second; despite controversies about the image of black culture and the reviving of old stereotypes. Thematically and technically Walker and Hurston reclaim two territories: the experience of uneducated rural southern women and the language of black folk culture.

Our purpose in this study is to show essentially how black women writers use their literary productions to tell the stories of black women who try to find out the truth about themselves and the world they live in through different circumstances and in different cultures. To achieve this goal, we found it necessary to employ textual and thematic criticism.

List of Abbreviations

CP : The Color Purple

TE : Their Eyes Were Watching God

In Search : In Search of our Mothers' Gardens : Womanist Prose

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General Introduction

A persistent theme throughout African American women's literature is the expression of one's wholeness far from the ragged image drawn by the others. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* were published four decades separate, however; they engulf remarkable common preoccupations that characterize the black women's literary tradition which is now thriving through the literary achievements of such writers as Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange and Audre Lorde. Alice Walker never met Hurston but in 1973, when she discovered the unmarked grave of Zora Neale Hurston and read her stories, she made an active choice to befriend the spirit of Hurston. The latter was an influential writer, but most of her work was out of print by the time she died in 1960. She was a forgotten writer until Alice Walker blew the dust away from the covers, and re-introduced Hurston's work into American literature. While Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston are often linked together, few scholars have looked critically at what the two actually have in common in their texts. This study documents the ways that these two women have earned a literary immortality by reporting so vividly the suffering and resilience of two women who are determined to claw their ways out of darkness into self-knowledge and the beauty of freedom. Thus, this work will be in the form of a literary typology in which the shared areas of interest of both writers will be considered.

Their Eyes Were Watching God was published in 1937, long after the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance. The 1930s was a period of harsh times and depression which ended the openness that allowed the prosperity of the Harlem Renaissance. Social realism, which found a breeding ground as the depression worsened, suggested that art should be primarily political and expose social injustice in the world. Thus, this new wave of writers dismissed the premises of the Harlem Renaissance for its political void and deficiency of expression which no longer echoed their aspirations.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is the story of Janie's search for spiritual enlightenment and a strong sense of her own identity. Her journey starts lonesome and ends so. She travels along a thorny road not seeking a partner but a secure sense of independence. Janie's departure was one of a lost soul burdened with uncertainties and ignorance of the self. However, upon her return to Eatonville she blossoms into a

strong and proud woman. When she tells her story to Phoebe, she begins with her revelation under the blossoming pear tree—the revelation that initiates her quest. Under the pear tree, she witnesses a perfect union of harmony within nature. She knows that she wants to achieve this type of love, a reciprocity that produces oneness with the world, but is unsure how to proceed. At this point, she is unable to articulate even to herself exactly what she wants. She goes through a loveless marriage, then rolls in the tide with a controlling, ambitious, second husband, until she finally finds love with Tea Cake and discovers herself alone, rowing her own way home.

Born and raised in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, Hurston escaped the hurt that racism inflicts on many black children. She was nourished by a tradition of storytelling and expressive, colourful, metaphoric speech. Because she experienced both herself and her people as beautiful and powerful, Hurston was able to explore and celebrate black life on its own terms, not primarily in its relationship to white society. Free from the compulsion to concentrate on racism and oppression, she could as an anthropologist delight in collecting black folklore in *Mules and Men* and as a novelist focus on a young woman's quest for selfhood, identity and wholeness in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

In 1982, Walker published her most famous novel *The Color Purple* which chronicles the struggle of several black women in rural Georgia in the first half of the twentieth century. Upon its publication, *The Color Purple* unleashed a storm of controversy. It instigated heated debates about black cultural representation, as a number of male African-American critics complained that the novel reaffirmed old racist stereotypes about pathology in black communities and of black men in particular. Critics also charged Walker with focusing heavily on sexism at the expense of addressing notions of racism in America. Nonetheless, *The Color Purple* also had its ardent supporters, especially among black women and others who praised the novel as a feminist fable. The heated disputes surrounding *The Color Purple* are a testimony to the resounding effects the work has had on cultural and racial discourse in the United States.

The female protagonist in *The Color Purple*, Celie, undergoes a spiritual regeneration. She develops a strong character through a personal resurrection, as suggested by the title. The colour ‘purple’ is the symbol of resilience, equilibrium,

temperance, stability, and self-control, since it is an equal mixture of the chthonian red and the celestial blue. Celie's meek existence is mirrored in the less than obtrusive colour purple in the fields, in the creation of God.

The camouflaged theological dimension in Walker's novel is further echoed in another self-liberated female character, Shrug, who reveals the sacred unity between God and creation: "*It pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it*" (167). Shug observes the colour purple in the fields and the inner beauty of Celie whom she helps to find herself and step out of the undignified submissive life she was coerced to live. Shrug and, later in the novel, Celie are the indomitable female spirits that resulted from a joint process of rebirth and metamorphosis.

The colour purple is an epitome of femininity and need not be correspondent with the character of Celie alone, but with all the female characters in the novel through whom she redefines herself by similarities or contrasts. The sisterly bonds in the novel point out the importance of self-definition through relational terms.

For Janie, self-discovery and self-definition consist of learning to recognize and trust her inner voice, while rejecting the formulations others try to impose upon her. Increasingly, she comes to validate "*the kingdom of God within*" and to refuse to be conformed to the world. Like the women in Walker's novels, Janie must find the ground of her being, a source of value and authority out of which to live. This problem is especially acute for black women, both writers seem to be saying, because the structures neither of society nor of formal religion provide this grounding. Janie finds it by being true to her own poetic, creative consciousness; in *The Color Purple* Walker's characters discover it through the strength and wisdom available in the community of women.

Whereas Hurston's novel takes its form from the storytelling traditions of black culture, *The Color Purple* is more consciously literary. Written as a series of letters from Celie first to God and then to Nettie, the novel asserts its kinship both with the traditional literary form open to women - letters and journals- and with the 18th-century epistolary narratives out of which the English novel arose. Unlike Hurston, Walker links her novel to the larger literary tradition. The great achievement

of both writers, however, has been to open that tradition to black women's voices and to the transforming spiritual power of their vision.

The quest for selfhood is a persistent theme in the African American women's writings. Hurston and Walker explored this theme in their novels *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* through the journeys of their female protagonists Janie and Celie who lead a ferocious struggle against their societies' sexism and racism. The main areas that these authors explored are the physical and psychological growth of their female character, the power of language in perpetuating this growth, and the role of landscape in framing their journeys.

This research work is the result of a number of motivations:

- First, Hurston's style and themes represent a rich soil for study because they differ from mainstream *Negro* literature at a time when The Harlem Renaissance was a rather prescriptive force channelling creative writing to the area of combative politics.
- Second, Walker is a writer who led a similar rebellion by refusing to accept the common feminist ideas and replacing them with her own new concept of womanism which caused a revolution in the way women, men, and all human beings should deal with the ideals of freedom and equality.
- Third, the striking similarities between *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* stirred my curiosity to investigate the relations of influence, matrilineage, and textual overlappings.

By tradition, African American women writers share a common interest in representing the black female character as a seeker for selfhood and independence. The two most memorable characters are Hurston's Janie and Walker's Celie. However, African American female authors insist that no literary rivalry or anxiety exist between them, despite the critics' suggestions. Instead, they explain their literary relations as a natural affinity which brings them together in a common feminist struggle for freedom and equality. Nevertheless, Walker refused the ignorance of the existing feminist ideas of the basic black women's plight of racism. As a result, the concept of womanism was suggested by Walker as an alternative and more global perception of these ideals. Hence, three main questions arise:

1- What are the strategies that Hurston and Walker used to trace the journeys of their characters from nobody to a fully developed woman?

2- How does Walker's womanist ideology relate to Hurston?

3- How is Hurston's legacy, as a literary foremother, present in Walker's texts?

4- What kind of relationship exists between Hurston and Walker? Is it a simple affinity that brought them together in a shared campaign against racism and literary patriarchy or a natural literary anxiety between a mother and a daughter?

The ideology of womanism put forward by Walker in her book *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, originates from Walker's interest in Hurston's literary legacy and private life. This ideological connection between these two authors can be observed clearly in their most remarkable novels *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple*. Therefore, Walker's Celie is to a great extent a revision of Hurston's Janie.

The corpuses of the novels shall be analysed against the criteria of the theoretical foundations. Therefore, this study shall be divided as follows: a general introduction, the body of the research work in four chapters, and a general conclusion. This thesis relies mainly on Lacan's and Freud's theories in the psychoanalytical field and Bloom's thorough analyses of the novels in the formal and technical fields. This thesis will analyse closely the evolutions of the main characters who represent clearly the ideologies of their creators.

The first chapter will be devoted to the theoretical foundations which we saw paramount in order to set the base of this study. Therefore, due definitions and explanations of basic concepts will be included, notably the feminist theory, the development of the black female character in American literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the differences between the feminist and the womanist ideologies.

The second chapter will closely analyse the political, social, and cultural contexts of Hurston and the ways in which she stood out as a different and outrageous black woman writer. Then we shall discuss the life changes of the female protagonist

in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the different strategies used by Hurston to frame this journey including her psychological growth and the role of language to perpetuate her quest for selfhood and closure.

The third chapter will examine the psychoanalytic models in *The Color Purple* and the use of the epistolary form of the novel. The analyses of Bloom and Ross will be very helpful in explaining Walker's unique fusion of psychological and epistolary techniques in portraying her protagonist's metamorphosis.

The fourth chapter will shed the light on Hurston's literary and ideological influences on Walker and the way they are manifested in Walker's works, especially *The Color Purple*. Therefore, this chapter will show the areas where the two novels overlap in terms of themes, style and ideological streaming.

The general conclusion will be a synthesis of the main concerns of this research. Hence, this part of the thesis will provide a clear and concise summary of the main results obtained from the various critical views analysed throughout the body of the work.

Chapter one:

Theoretical Foundations

Introduction

In this chapter, we will try to trace the main features that characterize the feminist theory and how it affected the literary productions of the women who write about women's experiences. The theoretical part of this thesis will provide a ground on which the analyses put forward in the coming chapters will be built. Therefore, feminist/womanist perspectives will be the center around which the formal, psychoanalytic and stylistic discussions revolve. The feminist theory and the feminist thought brought women together into a collective struggle to undo patriarchy and male domination from Mary Wollstonecraft's manifesto *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), to Simone De Beauvoir's treatise *The Second Sex* (1949). In this chapter, we will discuss the history of feminism and its waves. Then, we will focus on the female literary tradition and how women fought to create a literary vehicle that transmits their voices and predicaments as women as well as artists.

This chapter will tackle the dilemma of the black woman writer who not only fights to eliminate patriarchy, but also strives to find a place in a feminist dogma that was created by white middle class women and for them. Here, we will see how black critics like Bell Hooks explore this theme and show the deficiencies of the feminist theory that fights classifications on one hand and nourishes them on the other, by willingly refusing to incorporate the racial struggle of the black women in its agenda. Therefore, we will take into consideration the triple jeopardy of the black women writers as they face sexism, racism and the denial of their white counterparts.

Since this research work is essentially about black women writers in the US, we found it necessary to provide an insight into the main historical stops in the black female literary tradition and how it evolved in form and concerns. Our main focus is to show how the black woman's character developed in the texts of the American writers from the mulatta to a fully defined woman or from stereotype to an active character in a leading role.

Moreover, we will discuss the concept of womanism as presented by Alice Walker who coined it in her critically acclaimed essay collection *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* in which she puts forward a new perspective of

looking at the experiences of the women of color. In this part, the weaknesses of feminism which is based on sexism surface as Walker suggests a more universalist view of freedom and human rights.

I.Feminism and the Feminist Theory:

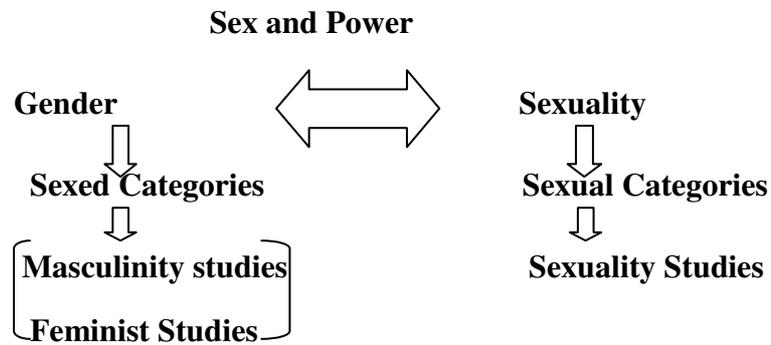
The findings of anthropology, history, theology, psychology, political science, physiology and sociology contributed in shaping a feminist vision on crucial issues such as: patriarchy, religious upbringing of girls, limited physical and educational training, and self-esteem. Feminists preach the establishment of greater rights, legal protection for women and the invalidation of gender hierarchy. The movement of feminism played a major role in the process of human liberation; however, women in their majority are not informed about the feminist writings and achievements of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In fact, women took part in the American and French revolutions, anti-slavery movement and the development of organized labor. For a long time, women have been unaware of their importance and group identity.

Feminism holds that “the personal is political», therefore; feminists believe that the academic tradition of drawing lines between the personal and the professional ought to be eliminated. One of the cornerstones of modern literary criticism is self-consciousness and the feminist literary criticism rests on that as well. Feminist criticism rests on a number of categories which are considered indispensable in shaping one’s reading and writing positions: class, race, sexual orientation, nationality, philosophical and political positioning, educational level and age.

The feminist vision affected the ways in which contemporary thinkers and writers such as Beasley perceive the dynamics of society and power. If we consider the term “sex” closely, we find that it has a binary reference to hierarchical classes such as “male and female”, which is also called “sexed regimes”, and to categories like heterosexual and homosexual, often linked to what is called “sexual regimes”. The term “sex” is still used in everyday language as a reference to one’s sex or sexuality. However, the term is increasingly becoming exclusive for the physical body. The “sexed” and “sexual” have been replaced, in scholarly use, by gender and sexuality respectively.

The field of gender/sexuality is divided into the three major subfields of feminism, masculinity and sexuality studies, as shown in figure 1:

Figure 1 The gender/sexuality field and subfields:



(Beasley, 2)

Nevertheless, this order seems to be a ground of dispute for many theorists, who view these terms as a construction of other relations, such as ethnicity, race, imperialism and colonialism.

I.1 Gender and Feminism:

Beasley explains that feminism is placed as a subfield of the overall field of gender/sexuality. We need to examine the term gender first. It is typically the process of classification on the basis of “sexed identities”. It is not necessarily the common division of male/female, which we observe in modern western societies. This categorization varies in other eras, areas and cultures. Gender classifies the members of the society in terms of the two biologically distinct human categories of male/female, as well as a social and occupational division, which is clear in the preassumed association of men with the public affairs and women with the domestic ones. But in reality men and women in modern western societies are both present in all the fields of life. Hence, gender has a binary reference to the physical and the social. This classification is cutting edge to the point of becoming oppositional, the thing that we observe in the commonly used phrase “the opposite sex”. Male /female categories are not only biologically and sociologically distinct but also put into a hierarchical order where one is privileged and the other devalued. The way in which the hierarchy is cast against negative and positive backgrounds is even more interesting. For example, Cranny Francis discusses the uses of “buddy” derived from brother and “sissy” from sister and how everybody wants to be a buddy but no one

prefers to be a sissy. In much the same way, the masculine category of “bachelor” is in a much more positive position compared to its feminine equivalent “spinster”. Although the distinction of male/ female is primarily made to divide, it is also a basic element of connection between the two because each one is defined by the opposite features of the other; for a man to be a man he should not be a woman. The meaning of gender and the stances towards it have undertaken constant alteration over time. Before the 1960’s, it was exclusive to the notions of “masculine” and “feminine”. Today, many writers delimit gender to the social categories of “men” and “women” while others consider it in relation to the social interactions and links between these two categories. This approach, Beasley insists, perceives gender as a structuring element rather than a distinctive one. Some writers go beyond distinction and advocate the elimination of the notion of gender altogether despite the opinion of their counterparts who believe that this elimination will become an element of paralysis both politically and socially because of the absence of marginal group identities.

I.2. Critical History of Feminism:

Feminism has a critical history that began with a dialectic observation of the “norm” or what was considered to be the only truth. Feminism functions as more than just a description of how the world operates but transcends that to the point of skepticism. This reasoning starts with questioning whether or not the world is supposed to be the way it is. Feminism primarily discusses misogyny and the superiority and centrality of men. Bev Thiele says that “*social and political theory was, and for the most part is, written by men, for men and about men.*”(Beasley, 16) Feminism enhances the impetus to fight patriarchy and anti-female bureaucracies. It is a collection of the insights of women and an exploration of the potentials of womanhood. The history of feminism is usually surveyed through three main distinctive periods:

I.2.1.First-Wave Feminism: The Human Modernist Emancipatory Liberationist Feminism

The predominant concern of this feminism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the critique of liberalism, which was the prevailing thinking of the time. Liberalism at that time supported the freedom of the individual to choose

and decide as free as possible from any governmental restraints or interventions. All the individuals were to trace their own paths and make their own wealth. The individuals' social and political rights were supposedly free from any gender distinction and reside in what makes them unique as human beings: their ability to think reasonably. Thus, the ability to reason meant that individuals do not need the paternal assistance represented by the state. Nevertheless, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Liberalism, despite its claims of gender neutrality, was in practice confined to men. First-wave feminism argued that: *“women were regarded as irrational creatures, were not permitted to vote, own property once married and had little legal control over their children or their bodies.”*(Beasley, 18)

This early form of feminism criticized the so-called universal approach of liberalism which excluded women from its agenda. However, first-wave feminists did not disagree with the primary notion of a universal standard for social and political rights and selfhood but pointed out that the liberal standard was predominantly male instead of universal. While a group of first-wave feminists supported the Marxist/socialist refutation of the liberal thinking, a larger group advocated the extension of the liberal universal notion to include women in order to allow them greater rights and full adult citizenship in the Liberal capitalist society.

I.2.2.Second-Wave Feminism:

It began in the 1960's and 1970's and criticized strongly the universal standard proposed by Liberalism. This type of feminism did not only include revisions of the Liberal or Socialist/Marxist feminisms but also introduced a new form of radical feminism. Despite the accounts upon which these forms of feminism had been characterized, they all shared an emancipatory standpoint. They called for a: *“compensatory reversal in which masculine bias was exposed and women's theorizing and activities were rescued from obscurity.”*(Beasley,19)

Second-wave feminists called upon an inevitable social change which would emerge from women's emancipation from the neglect and marginalization of the past, and insisted on the assimilation of women in the social landscape. Commentators of the second wave took a more critical stance towards the universal thinking of Liberalism than their sisters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but did not cut all ties with its notions. Hence second-wave feminists were still presenting a form of

emancipatory Modernist approach. One can characterize second-wave feminism as Modernist on a number of grounds.

First, second wave feminists rely on a universalised mode of analysis which allows them to reveal the mechanisms of dominance and oppression in the society. This universal mode of reasoning seeks the truth about power and aims at throwing off macro structures of power that oppress women and other subordinated groups (Beasley, 19). Secondly, power is dealt with in terms of dominance and suppression; it is a power over rather than a power to. It is a downward and negative force that restrains and limits. This negative power is schematized by second wave feminists in notions such as “patriarchy” and “compulsory heterosexuality”. In other words, second wave feminism offers a theory of power specifically the power exercised by men as a group over women as a subordinate group. So, power is the commodity of the dominant group: men. Thirdly, the main goal of this wave is to invalidate the authority of men and create a new notion of the self. Second wave feminists altered the conventional Liberal universals of “reason”, “individual” and “human” and expanded them to accept the reason and individual specificities of women. (20)

I.2.3.Third Wave Feminism:

While second wave feminists adopted a liberal emancipator stance to empower women’s social and political status, third wave liberal feminists also called post-feminists argue that the 1960’s and 1970 women’s endeavors were still adhering to what the society had to dictate on them. Third wave feminists considered greatly the ability of women to be responsible for their choices, beliefs and status. Post-feminists could also be characterized as anti-feminist because they believe in the woman’s individual responsibility and refuse the inclination of women to hide themselves behind a group identity as a victimized portion. This indicates a strong return to the individual approach of Liberalism. However, these writers still occupy a feminist position because they still advocate equality of men and women, and their focus lies in individual women rather than social discrimination. Some third wave writers such as Katie Roiphe and Rene Denfeld are convinced that women should stop blaming the society and take matters into their own hands as responsible, reasoning individuals. However, others like Naomi Wolf maintained a considerable

recognition of the obstacles and difficulties related to the social make up and to the group identity of women. (24)

I.3. Finding a Female Literary Tradition:

Eagleton, Carby and other critics believe that women's movement brought the female literary tradition into being and resurrected the classical writings which recorded female attitudes and imaginations. The feminist movements gave voice to women and presented a new understanding of the essence of femaleness. Eagleton explains the importance of feminist movements, first political, in creating a female literary tradition:

"It is the women's movement, part of the other movements of our time for a fully human life, that has brought this forum into being; kindling a renewed , in most instances a first-time, interest in the writings and writers of our sex. Linked with the old, resurrected classics on women, this movement in three years has accumulated vast new mass of testimony, of a new comprehension as to what it is to be female. Inequities, restrictions, penalties, denials, lynchings have been painstakingly and painfully documented: damaging differences in circumstances and treatment from that of males attested to; and limitations, harms, a sense of wrong voiced."

(Eagleton: 1)

In the 1970's feminist critics from Britain and the United States focused on the idea of silencing women writers and excluding them from literary history. In this period feminist critics were interested in reviving the forgotten work of women writers while

creating a context that would corroborate contemporary women writers and demonstrate what it takes to be a female. The fact that literary criticism concentrated on male writers urged the critics of this period to demand attention and recognition for women authors. However, the aim of these critics was not merely to find a female entity in the male-dominated literary world, but also to create a tradition among women themselves. Women writers have always felt an affinity among themselves; they competed against each other and encouraged those who were reluctant to share their experiences. This “affinity” is also seen in the way one work may pave the ground for another, as we will see in the example of Hurston and Walker.

Literary critics like Showalter offered two views. First, she criticized the use of the term “movement” which implies an ongoing continuous tradition, unlike the female literary works in reality which are easily fractured and erased. She spoke of the vulnerability and ruptures in the female literary body that constantly leave the newcomers struggling to revive the broken tradition. Second, Showalter believes that the concept of “female imagination” coined by Patricia Meyer Spack stresses the basic and natural differences between male and female perceptions of the world. This essentialist or “biologistic” way of thinking confirms that women have intrinsic common bonds. Nevertheless, the concept of “female imagination” could endanger the female tradition because it represents a risk of rendering female writings ahistorical and apolitical by neglecting the indispensable aspects of class, race and history. Showalter, along with other literary critics, was among the first to stress that establishing a female tradition was challenging because it introduced the determinant of “gender” into literary criticism and rearranged literature as a whole. (Eagleton: 31)

The feminist tradition redefined literary criticism by involving the female factor. Feminists questioned even the most established of criticisms. The feminist front speakers criticized the Marxist criticism about the class bias of literary tradition and expressed their contempt of its androcentricity. The judgments and arguments which were presented as academic and objective are now questionable and ideologically unconvincing. (34)

The feminists’ claims did not miss the contradictions among their own body of criticism as well. First, how can feminists complain about the ongoing silencing of women while talking at the same time about the great feminist tradition that needs to

be uncovered? Second, how can feminists speak of a rich and varied female tradition while producing closed and homogeneous literary works, which focus mainly on white middle class heterosexual women, who live in England or America?

Many works of criticism fall under this description in the late 1960's and 1970's; books which are considered sacred texts in feminist literary criticism such as Marry Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1968), Patricia Meyer Spack's *The Female Imagination* (1975), Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* (1977) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists form Bronte to Lessing* (1977).

(40)

II. The Feminist Movement in the US: Black Feminism and Racism

II.1. Beginnings and the Black Representations:

In the nineteenth century, the Seneca Falls Declaration was the first important document of an American women's movement. The Declaration was adopted in a meeting in which the social, civil, and religious conditions and rights of women were considered. After this meeting, a number of resolutions were made, most notably the one that confirms that: *"All laws which prevent women from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of men, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority"* (Shneir,81). Black women and men were present at the meeting as well despite the obvious contempt of the white audience.

Frederick Douglass (1817-1895), an American slave who had been freed ten years prior to the Seneca Falls Declaration and editor of the weekly abolitionist newspaper The North Star, wrote in his autobiography: *"when the true history of the antislavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages, for the cause of the slave has been peculiarly woman's cause."*(83). Douglass was moved by women's devotion and efficiency at addressing the cause of slavery and became interested in women's rights. He was seen as a women's rights man and said: *"I am glad to say that I have never been ashamed to be thus designated."* (83) He was present at the Seneca Falls meeting and was an effective advocate for full political rights for women. For many decades to come, Douglass participated actively in women's rights conventions and meetings despite the hostile and abusive responses from the American organs of opinion. In his editorial in The North Star of July 28th, 1884, Douglass wrote:

"A discussion of the rights of animals would be regarded with far more complacency by many of what are called the wise and good of our land, than would be a discussion of the rights of women."(84) , he added *" Many who have at last made the discovery that negroes have some rights as well as other members of the human family, have yet to be convinced that women are entitled to any."*(84)

It is said that the mother of black feminism and the inspiration of all black women to initiate their double struggle against racism and sexism was Sejourner

Truth (1795-1883). She was born into slavery in New York and gained her freedom in 1827. She replaced her slave name Isabella with the symbolic name Sejourner Truth. She felt that she had a mission to “...*testify the sins against her people.*” (93), so she spoke wherever she found an audience and by mid-century she became famous as an antislavery activist at abolitionist gatherings. Truth played a part in the feminist cause since its early years and was the first woman of color present at the First National Women’s Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1850. Massachusetts was the heart of the abolitionist activities and the thousands of slave black women were not neglected and were referred to as “the *most grossly wronged and foully outraged of all women.*”(93)

In 1851, Truth participated in a women’s convention at Akron, Ohio. Frances D. Cage was president and she later said that the women at the convention were not happy with the presence of Truth and begged not to let her deliver a speech for fear that all the newspapers in the land would mix their cause with abolition. However, when Truth spoke her words left an instant impression. Cage was attracted by the magic of her words and recorded her memorable words: “*I could work as much and eat as much as a man- when I could get it- and I bear the lash as well! Ain’t I a woman?*”(95)

II.2 Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience:

Throughout the history of the black women, sexism stood as equally oppressive and threatening as racism, patriarchy or *institutionalized sexism* (Hooks, Ain’t I, 214). All these elements formed the infrastructure of the American social order and racial imperialism. Sexism was brought from Europe with the early white American fathers. It lingered in the new worlds and was to bring about a great deal of misfortune to the female black slaves.

Early on, the black slave trade focused on importing workers and was in need of black males. However, the growing number of plantations and the augmenting need for labor along with the small number of female slaves forced white female immigrants to engage in sexual relationships with black slaves to produce new workers. In Maryland in 1664, the first anti-amalgamation law was passed to prohibit sexual intercourse between black males and white females. The offspring of a relationship between a black male slave and a white female immigrant was legally

free. However, what a black woman bears is legally enslaved regardless of the race of the father. The value of the female slave increased and the slave traders shifted their focus to the black women, who would do all the work and produce slave children in any case. Amanda Berry Smith, a 19th century black missionary and African culture observer, wrote prior to a visit to the American communities:

"The poor women of Africa like those of India have a hard time. As a rule, they have all the hard work to do. They have to cut and carry the wood, carry all the water on their heads and plant all then rice. The men and boys cut and burn the bush with the help of the women; but sowing the rice, and planting the cassava, the women have to do. You will so often see a great, big man walking ahead with nothing in his hand but a cutlass (as they always carry that or a spear), and a woman, his wife, coming on behind with a great big child on her back, and a load on her head. No matter how tired she is, her lord would not think of bringing her a jar of water, to cook his supper with, or of beating the rice, no, she must do that." (120)

The African woman was a reference in *"The art of obedience to a higher authority by the tradition of her society"* (122). Thus the black woman was the perfect subject for enslavement. The white owners on the black plantations saw that the African were so useful as slaves they were already accustomed to working in fields and at home as well. The passage of the slaves from Africa to America aboard slave ships was a hell for the African men and women who were transported to live into slavery in the new world. The torment and brutalization that men and women endured on the ships was only the beginning of a doctriated process that would turn the free African human being into a helpless slave.

Scholars argue that the black male consciousness was deeply affected by slavery more so than women. They even suggested that the black men were the real

victims of slavery because they were stripped from their, once revered, male identity. The dehumanizing process of slavery was graver on men because the deprivation from their masculinity did not only lead to a loss of self identification but also to dissolution of the black family structure. Black men were emasculated, so their traditional patriarchal role was ended. The implicit subjugation of women , in this assumption, initiated a positive concept of the self among black men, an idea that consolidated a sexist social pattern. (124)

Masculinity in colonial as in modern times meant the possession of physical and mental prowess and vigor. Generally, there are no scholarly investigations which were carried out to describe the suffering of black women during slavery. The prevailing assumption was that the experiences of men were more important than those of women and that the assertion of a patriarchal position among male black slaves was paramount. The reason why no serious attention was paid to investigate the black female experiences was the unwillingness of scholars to describe the social status of women. This neglect was fed by a sexist entourage leading to a total distortion of the female half of the slaves' tragedy. (130)

As a result, sexism and racism joined forces to intensify and worsen what was already an intolerable way of living for the black female slaves. The work area reveals the ways in which men and women slaves were differentiated. Unlike male slaves who worked in the fields, women labored on plantations and households, bred children, and on top of all that endured the sexual assaults of the white masters. Black males were not forced to do women's work, but women did men's work in addition to their feminine tasks. Therefore, the attention of the scholars should have been paid not only to the process of the demasculinization of male slaves, but more accurately to the masculinization of the female slave. (131)

In the eyes of the white society, a white woman who works the land was unworthy of being called a woman. Thus, the female slave who worked in fields in her African society as an extension of her womanhood was nothing more than a substitute of men in the American society. (135)

II.3.Feminism and Racism:

The feminist movement in the USA ,from its early beginnings, has been set against a racist background. However, this does not devalue feminism in America as an acknowledgeable political and social ideology. The Women’s Rights Movement neglected the racially segregational social structure of America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The foremothers of the women rights activists did not advocate equality for all women and excluded the black women from their emancipatory freedom seeking demands. However, it is fair to mention that some historical records show that many women’s rights advocates were also abolitionists assumed to be antiracist. (120)

Bell hooks, the famed black feminist theorist, criticized the historiographers who created a version of the American history where white women advocates of women’s rights were heroes of antiracism. The academic work on abolitionism is generally informed by what hooks called “*fierce romanticism*” (120). Thus, the general tendency in contemporary times is to define abolitionism as the refusal to accept or engage in racist activities. Hooks argues that abolitionists, men or women and despite their strong protest against racism, were against granting complete and unconditional social and political rights to black people Joel Kovel in *White Racism: A Psychohistory* asserts that : “ *The actual aim of the reform movement, so nobly and bravely begun, was not the liberation of the black, but the fortification of the white, conscience and all.*” (cited by Hooks, 121)

American Women’s Studies programs were established with an all white faculty. White women claimed that they were reporting the experiences of all American women while excluding black women altogether. The relationship between feminism and race was a hot topic of debate. Whether or not racism had something if anything to do with racism was a difficult issue. (150)

Most American women of all races believe that racism is solely linked to race hatred. Racism, in the case of black and white people, denotes the discrimination and prejudice against of the white people against the black folk. The American woman’s knowledge of racism is primarily derived from direct personal experience, television, conversations and movies. Hence, the American woman suffers from a remarkable shortage of knowledge and understanding of racism as a tool of imperialism and

colonization. Experiencing racism, reading about it or watching a movie does not necessarily mean understanding its roots and development through history. Bell Hooks explains in her book *Ain't I a Woman* that the American woman's lack of comprehension in this area does not indicate lack of vigor but the severe extent of her victimization. The majority of American women were taught a version of American history where racism was a tragic and unfortunate human attitude that could be stopped by demonstrations, peaceful speeches, bonding between the black and white people and changing the laws. Educational institutions did nothing to reveal the deeper understanding of racism as a political ideology and human tragedy. (140)

American women were taught to accept racism as a form of white supremacy and sexism as a form of male supremacy. They were brainwashed to maintain the concept of racial imperialism as white dominance and sexual imperialism as patriarchy. Ironically, American women were taught to accept and perpetuate the very evil that devaluates them. As a result, American women, regardless of their social positions or education, have been subject to perpetual sexist and racist socialization.

White women would have known that demolishing frontiers between women among themselves requires, inevitably, the involvement of the issue of racism, had they known the reality about the politics of racism. Racism, here, is not just a general notion that refers to the evil which exists in the society, but to the hidden race prejudice that white women may develop in their psyches. It is true that America is patriarchally dominated, but the accurate examination of the American history reveals that the United States was built on a racially imperialistic base. Tunisian writer Albert Memmi in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized* the relationship between racism and imperialism:

"Racism appears...not as an incidental detail, but as a con-substantial part of imperialism. It is the highest expression of the colonial system and one of the most significant features of the colonialist. Not only does it establish a fundamental discrimination between colonizer

*and colonized... but it also lays the foundation
for the immutability of this life."(122)*

The feminists who believe that sexual imperialism is more endemic than racial imperialism hold some truth in their claims. However, racial imperialism prevails in America. The social status of black and white women in America has always been different. During the 19th and 20th centuries, similarities between the experiences of black and white women were hardly seen. It is undeniable that both black and white women were victims of sexist discrimination, but black women, who were also victims of racism, endured hardships that no white woman had to face. In addition, racial imperialism granted white women the right to oppress black women and men.

Ever since the birth of the women's movement in the USA, white women have been attempting to adjust their positions in the racial issue so as not to allow it to occupy a big space in their agenda. White women argued that male patriarchy was responsible for racism and that, as an oppressed entity by the same oppressor, they cannot be accused of this evil. Radical Feminist Adrienne Rich, in her observation of the accountability of white females in her essay: *Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism and Gynophobia* asserts :

"If black and white feminists are going to speak of female accountability, I believe the word racism must be seized grasped in our bare hands, ripped out of the sterile or defensive consciousness in which it so often grows, and transplanted so that it can yield new insights for our lives and our movement. An analysis that places the guilt for active domination, physical and institutional violence, and the justifications embedded in myth and language, on white women not only compounds false consciousness; it allows us to deny or neglect the charged connection among black and white women from the historical conditions of slavery on, and it impedes any real discussion of women's

instrumentality in a system which oppresses all women and in which hatred of women is also embedded in myth, folklore, and language."

(Rich in Hooks,123)

II.4.Black women and Feminism:

In an Indiana anti-slavery rally, Sejourner Truth bared her breasts in front of the audience to prove that she was a woman, in response to a man who yelled: "***I don't believe you really are a woman.***" (Hooks, Ain't I, 159)It was an act that showed the pride of a black woman, who felt no shame of being female in a black skin. The man who yelled disrespectfully at Sejourner indirectly mirrored the way the American society viewed black womanhood. Black women were considered as a thing or a laboring animal. (151)

At the annual convention of the Women's Right Movement in Akron Ohio in 1852, Sejourner became the first woman to call attention to the black slave woman. Truth, in regards to her laboring ability alongside men, was the perfect example that women could be the equal of men at work. Conveniently, Sejourner spoke directly after a man who had argued that women cannot be the equals of men at work because they are naturally inferior to man physically. Sejourner responded: "***...Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me- and ain't I a woman?***" (15)

At those conventions black women were more convenient spokesmen than most of the white women, because they were laborers and could easily relate to the discussions about the equality of men and women at work. Truth was not the only black woman, who spoke eagerly in favor of women's rights. Her efforts inspired other politically-minded black women to stand their grounds and communicate their insights. American historiographers, gravely informed by sexism and racism, have tended to overshadow or even erase the work that black women did for the cause of women's rights. White feminist scholars, who corroborate the feminist movement have a similar attitude towards the contributions of black women. Contemporary works such as *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism* by Barbara Berg, *Herstory* by June Sochen, *Hidden from History* by Sheila Rowbothan, and *The*

Women's Movement by Barbara Deckard and many others did not mention the contributions of black women in the 19th century women's movement. The book "*Century of Struggle*" by Eleanor Flexner published in 1959 was one of the few historical documentations of the role that black women played in the women's movement. (161)

The majority of the women who are active in the contemporary movement of women hold for truth that the white women started the women's revolt against men's chauvinism and that black women were preoccupied with the cause of slavery not the emancipation of women from patriarchy. They go further in their argument saying that white women presided all the movements of women's liberation. This is true, but it is also a proof of the racial imperialism that America has historically embraced and made it impossible for black women to ever be in charge.

Marry Church Terrel was a committed spokesperson for the rights of black Americans. She presided the National Association of Black Women. She worked to assume a place for black women in the struggle for women's rights. She ,specifically, advocated equality for her sex in the field of education. Like the other black militants, Terrel's involvement in the struggle to develop the situation of her race did not in any sense minimize her devotion to women's rights. Terrel's narrative: *A Colored Woman in a White World* considered the lives of black women and the ways in which racism and sexism affected them.(163)

As a result to racial imperialism, white women organized themselves in clubs and organizations like: Women's Christian Temperance Union, Young Women's Christian Association, General Federation of Women's Clubs. White women did not need to express overtly that these organization were exclusively white. However, black women tended to label their gatherings racially such as: The Colored Women's League, National Federation of Afro-American Women, and the National Association for Colored Women. Hence, because of their racial identification, scholars assume that black women were preoccupied with their anti-racist struggle. In fact, black female reform organizations were primarily, and contrary to the scholars' assumptions, involved with the women's movement. It was because of the racism of white women and the social apartheid which were exercised in the US that black women chose to focus on their lot rather than all women. (164)

Josephine St Pierre Ruffin, attempted to work alongside wide organizations but learnt that black women could not depend on white women to achieve an active participation in the women's movement. She told her audience at The First National Conference of Colored Women held in Boston in 1895:

"The reasons why we should confer are so apparent that it would seem hardly necessary to enumerate them, and yet there is none of them but demand our serious consideration. In the first place we need to feel the cheer and inspiration of meeting with each other, we need to gain the courage and fresh life that comes from the mingling of congenial souls, of those working for the same ends. Next, we need to talk over not only those things that are of special interest to us colored women, the training of our children, openings for our boys and girls, how can they be prepared for occupations and occupations may be found or opened for them, what we especially can do for the education of the race with which we are identified."

(Hooks,2000,17)

Ruffin and other black women who shared her sentiments did not call for an exclusive interest to black women but for an organization that could address the issues of all women.

Despite the fact that black women were excluded from the organizations of white women, they maintained a belief in the necessity of a union of black and white women to move forward and achieve their ultimate ends. Black suffragist Fannie Barrier Williams addressed the World Congress of Representative Women and noted clearly that black women were as seriously devoted as any other women to the women's rights cause.

Women's rights activists in the mid nineteenth century were moved by religious sentiments and were agitated by morality. They attacked slavery not racism. In fact they were not seeking equality for the black people and therefore were still racist despite their anti-slavery efforts. They worked to put an end to the tragedy of slavery, but did nothing to change the social order where the white people were higher in rank than the black man and women. On the contrary, they desired to keep that hierarchy and maintain their racial supremacy.

White women, whose movement was received unenthusiastically by the patriarchal American society, were aware of their own weak position while they were fighting slavery. Abby Kelly's assertion: "*we have good cause to be grateful to the slave for the benefit we have received to ourselves, in working for him. In striving to strike his iron off, we found most surely, that we were manacled ourselves.*" (17) is often used as an evidence for the position of white women.

The idea that white women have learned the limitation of their own social status through their fight against slavery is, to a great extent, misleading. White women were born and raised into institutionalized sexism and grew to maturity to be aware of that. What women found out through their activism against slavery was that white men's intentions were to acknowledge the rights of the black people while denouncing the rights of women. Thus, white women activists were forced into demanding equal rights with white man for fear of being classified in the same rank as the black folk or even being dumped into a lower class than black men.

Despite the efforts of white women to make the plight of the black slave synonymous to theirs, there was no way to even approximate the dehumanization that the slave endured to the oppression that white women were subjected to. The white women advocates used the horrors of the cause of slavery to fortify their own cause.

II.5. Images of Black Women in Afro-American Literature, from Stereotype to Character:

Until the 1940s, the images of black women have been stereotyped. During the slavery and reconstruction periods, especially southern white literature assigned black women a role that further nourished submission. The pattern of "mammy", Aunt Jemina, the most known black figure in southern white literature was presented

as the utter opposite of the white woman. Mammy was portrayed as fat, enduring, strong, kind, and nurturing. A woman who needs so little. She was a woman with a round shape and big breasts, a woman who was desired and needed, unlike the white woman who had to debase herself to perform the role of a mother. The white woman was described as pretty, frail and unable to do hand work. Hence, the two images depend on each other; the white woman's image would be as crystal-like as it was portrayed by white southern writers if she labored and took care of children. The roles of "mammy" were mainly physical. She worked and showed the sensuousness that white women feared to show. Therefore, the black woman was used as a surrogate of all the physical functions that the white woman was so afraid to perform. (Christian,2)

The images of the black woman as a concubine or a conjure can be analyzed in much the same way. She was the reservoir of all the thoughts and feelings that the white woman was terrified with. While the white Southern literature focused on the black woman as the nurturing mammy, African –American literature explored the image of the mulatta. Novels like *Clotel* 1850 and *Lola LeRoy* 1892, the first published novel by a black woman, created this heroine, who became an enduring image for black women in black literature for generations.(2)

The mulatta theme reveals the dilemma of values that black people faced as a conquered people. Her being in the center of the conflict as she represents the forbidden crossing of cultures. She is an American woman who was born into this world as a result of a notorious relationship between a slave mother and a white master. This relationship is as ironic as can be because it contradicts the basic element in the philosophy of slavery, which considers black people inhuman. So, what is the result of this relationship, a person or some sort of an inhuman deformed existence? Or, is the mulatta a bit of both? The white man denied the humanness of the black woman for economic reason but his desires acknowledged it. (3)

The tragedy of the mulatta began as a mere reading material for white people. It must be noted that the first black writers wrote for white audiences because the slaves were prohibited by the state laws from reading or writing. The white audiences enjoyed reading about the plight of the mulatta in much the same way a guilty person looks with joy and pride at his own wrong deeds.

The mulatta was a mixture of the physical appearance of both races. Although this fact further invalidated the philosophy of the inhuman slave, the white people considered highly the whitening of the black race not realizing that the existence of the mulatta is also blackening their whiteness. As a result of that, the mulatta becomes the center of cultural transference. In literature, the mulatta lives in the Big House causing great grief and jealousy to her mistress who has to confront the promiscuity of her husband. Thus, the mulatta lives a double experience of comfort and luxury, on one hand, and the deviation and chagrin of disharmony, on the other. (5)

The birth of the mulatta aggravated the pain of being a slave. The black field mother, whose mulatta was taken from her at an early age to live in the Big House, faced the inevitable questioning of the mulatta's loyalty: Is she loyal to her master or slave mother? The mulatta is not a source of plight to the black woman alone, it is to the black male slave a reminder of his powerlessness and inability to protect his women from the white man's aggression. In *Clotel* and other novels of the same genre, the mulatta is represented as a person who deserves to be free, creating a whole new challenge to the simple definition of freedom. She should be free because she is beautiful, refined and brave. Her beauty is inherited from the white qualities of beauty. Her refinement is a result of spending a lifetime among the fine rich white people, and her bravery is a matter of common sense because she succeeded to survive under a social code that failed to define her position. The representation of the black woman as a mulatta in the black literary tradition reached a peak in early twentieth century in Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), and Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929). (6)

II.6.The Explorations of the Character of the Black Woman in Modern Afro-American Literature:

In the decade preceding the blossoming of the Harlem Renaissance, black people had moved in large numbers from the agricultural South to big cities like New York. That great migration paved the way to Harlem Renaissance, which was the Mecca of black people in the twenties when jazz, urban blues and a new pride in one's race were flourishing. Literature was affected by the new spirit of the age and huge body of literary works was shaped. Black women also migrated to big cities, and despite their hopes for a better and improved life, the substance stayed the same.

Things looked different but were in reality the same. Instead of working in fields picking cotton or cleaning the houses of the white masters, the black women worked as domestics, factory laborers, or prostitutes, in other words, black women were at the lowest bottom of the society's working scale. (10)

Literature had to keep up with the reality of things. In *Cane* (1923), women of the South did not speak for themselves but were spoken of and the mulattas were used as metaphors of what is mad and beautiful. The fairytale-like rendering of reality in Jessie Fausset's *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931) was another example of how far writers were from truth of color and class conflict. The characters of Nella Larsen in *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929) represented the stereotype of the mulatta par excellence. (11)

The transition from the image of the tragic mulatta to a more vivid and complex look at the black woman as she was in the American reality started with the work of Zora Neale Hurston. Her autobiographical work "*Dust Tracks on the Road*" (1942) was transitional. The wandering conversational tone that she innovated was drew a multicolored of her own emotions and thoughts which broke down the old stereotypes with a rich reservoir of details. (12)

In 1946 Ann Petry published "*The Street*". Petry's work and Hurston's served as a move toward a more twentieth century vision of the black woman in America and away from the stereotypical image of the Southern mulatta as a heroine. The urban life of black women was painted with complexity of character as the twentieth century progressed. (12)

Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1941) belonged to a new literary approach of the era which mirrored the harsh and bleak loss of hope in the inner cities and how social and personal crime are related by causality. The alienated and struggling characters of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* and Lutie Johnson in *The Street* became largely explored models in later literary works. The novels of this period emphasized the fragmentation of the black community which was more predominant in the North than in the Southern towns. Husbands in the North abandon their wives not because they were sold off but because they failed to be men in their eyes. They were incapable of protecting their wives and children or finding a job. The core remains untouched despite the apparently different apparel. The children in the North were not

sold or bought, but taken anyway to jail or reform schools. Poverty was the jailer and racism the lock. The alienation of people from one another and the ache of struggling broke friendships and eradicated family ties. The plague of suspicion and mistrust was a prevailing nightmare. The substance did not change with the exception of one detail; in the North one was made to believe he was free. The codes of liberty were incorporated within the minds of the blacks despite the discrepancies and contradictions they faced in reality. Thus, frustration and confusion about one's identity and status in the society caused the already ragged situation to worsen. (14)

The period 1945-1975 was a very rich one for black women writers who covered a large scope of themes, some of which were dominant. In the genre of the novel four novelists marked their dominance: Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Chester Himes and Ralph Ellison. In Wright's novels *Native Son* or *The Outsider* the woman is generally seen as a victim whose fate was decided by the society around her. In *Black Boy*, we learn just a little about Wright's grandmother and mother representing the suffering religious women who stand as a reminder of pain for the author. The character of "Mary" in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* takes us back to the nineteenth century image of mammy when she vanishes from the book after saving the solo alienated hero from his illness. Chester Himes' female black characters were sex kitten portrayed as sexual subjects or toys as in *Pinktoes*. His characterization of women was more like a caricature which was probably a comment on the very stereotype. (15)

The images of the black women in these four novels are very close to the stereotypical images of black women generated by the white Southern writers in the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period black women writers had to step up speak for themselves. The black woman had to reflect on her own situation and discover her own identity. She had to start considering her growth and relationship with men, children, society, history and philosophy based on her own experiences. Those years were overwhelming and some women writers tended to deliver explosive comments which projected how intense, diverse and complex the lives of black women can get through their own unfiltered eyes. The writings of black women in this period were characterized by trends. The characters of black women were given new physical and psychological images which no longer applied to the features of the tragic mulatta. The mammy was no longer a needless caring entity; her

character was taken to a whole new level where her needs and desires are expressed. The relationships of men and women were also moved from generic to more detailed scrutinizations which focused mainly on the social restraints on marriage. More strikingly, the black woman was not only seen as a tool or a sufferer, but also as a thinker, a feeler and a conscious human being. The black woman was finally seen as a three dimensional person not just a picture on the wall. She had a culture, a gender, a race and visions to share with the world. Those were not stereotypes because the stereotype is the antonym of humanness. The stereotype whether positive or negative is a powerful renderer of the worthy to the worthless and of the human to the inhuman. (18)

Paule Marshall studied thoroughly the creation of character. In her essays and lectures she focuses on the importance of crafting real distinct people who affect and are affected by the two vital elements of society and culture. She dives into her characters to discover the incentives behind their actions as well as the time and pace in which they live. The black women she creates in her books are rounded out. She represents the usual figures of the black woman: a devoted mother, a prostitute or a martyred woman but instead of the flat stereotypical characterization, she tries to unfold the complex layers of the psyches of those women until the stereotype is totally melted in the mind of the reader. Creating a space for the female character was an innovative way to dispel stereotype, and was a strategy to free the black woman character from limitation and predictability. (20)

Toni Morrison's novels *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Sula* (1974) are illustrations of another theme which grew more mature and subtle with her work. Both novels demonstrate the search for beauty in the midst of the ugliness and restrictions of life inside and out. The women in her novels are double faced; looking inward while wandering outside. They live within themselves and without. The contradictions and complications of life are measured and analyzed by the friendships that Morrison's women have with other women. So, the black woman looks for continuity within herself and between people in the cycle of life. Toni Morrison's characters are not only human beings, her characterization patters are full of symbols and signs. Robins, wind, fire and marigolds are characters that live and leave a trace in the same manner human characters do. (21)

For instance, in *The Bluest Eye* Morrison uses the subtlety of her language to describe the psychological trauma of a group of black girls who grew up in a society where blue eyes and fair hair were the standards of beauty. She explains the continuity between the perception of one's physical appearance and the development of the psyche. The black girls in the book don't only search for the beauty which comes along with having blue eyes but the peace, clarity and harmony that the color blue symbolizes. Toni Morrison's characters are proof of how far literature moved from the types of the nineteenth century. Hence, the prevalent characteristic of this literature is the constant removal of stereotypical images. (22)

Stereotype is a comforting way of escaping the bitter realities, and moving away from set images could be quite aching. Fine Afro-American women writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker wrote from different political, cultural, historical and philosophical points of reference. They wrote about country and city life. They wrote fantasies and tackled issues as social realists. They dared play with their styles from traditional to experimental, "*they leave us with the diversity of the experience of black women in America, what she made of it and how she is transforming it.*" (28). The black woman has now a tradition of her own which allows the reader to discover the experience of black women with all of its racial and historical particularities, and their aspirations of how the future will be.

III. Feminism and Womanism

Womanism was adapted by Alice Walker in her book *"In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose"*, to describe the experiences of women of color. Alice Walker defines the womanist as a woman who appreciates women's culture and their ability of exchanging and showing emotions. A womanist stands for the wholeness for both male and female groups because the womanist is traditionally a universalist not a separatist:

"She explores the individual identity of black woman and how her identity and bonding with other women affects the health of her community at large. Alice Walker describes this affinity among women as womanism. For her, womanist is one who is committed to the survival and integrity of the entire black race."

(Sree, 16)

The movement of feminist concentrated largely on the oppression based on sexism. However, feminists who are mainly from the white middle class ignored the more severe oppression based on racism and classism suffered by black women. It was because of this ignorance and ethnocentrism that the black women precised womanism as a more intense fight against oppression and prejudice. According to Layli Philips womanism can be described in five main points. First, the womanists are anti-oppression because they realize the different types of oppression, therefore leading an anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobe struggle. Womanism seeks to transcend the relations of domination and oppression by blurring all the lines that separate human being and classifies them. Second, womanism encourages the use of a vernacular language as a vehicle to face the daily realities of the collectivity in order to attain people of various horizons who share the same human needs and preoccupations of food, love, companionship, health, housing, life and death. Third, Phillips defines womanism as non-ideological in nature because it stands for all the people of the world and expresses the realities of all the individuals and groups without exceptions and without the limitations of an ideological frame. Fourth, womanism places a special interest on the community as a group that is widened at a

variety of levels starting from the black woman or women of color, followed by the black community in general, then other communities of color and all the people who suffer from oppression and finally humanity. Therefore womanism is not only preoccupied with the issues of black women but with the common good of all people. The fifth element, according to Phillips, which defines womanism is the spiritual dimension that reconciles transcendence and everyday business. This side of womanism is manifested through social activism that takes roots in spiritual belief. This is probably the most original and controversial characteristic of womanism. In the same subject, Layli Phillips specified a number of methods that womanists use effectively to achieve social transformation like: dialogue, mediation, spiritual activity, promotion of harmonization and coordination, equilibrium and non-violence.

Although womanism has its specificities at a variety of levels, some authors use womanism and black feminism interchangeably. This is probably due to the similarities in terms of the interest in the black woman and her experience, and because of the shared heroines and foremothers. Other critics make a strict distinction between the two based on the prioritization of men. Black or even white feminists focus mainly and sometimes exclusively on women as opposed to womanism which deals with the preoccupations of men and women. the concern of womanists in the welfare of men is considered by feminists a diversion from the feminist critique of anti-androcentrism.

Womanists argue that the achievements of second wave feminism were in benefit of the lifestyles and family structures of the educated upper-middle class women. Womanists assert that the consequences of this exclusion of the interests of black women backlashed on the colored women and caused unintended harm and rupture in the structure of the black family unit. (20)

Conclusion

This theoretical background was essentially meant to put into evidence the main stages in the history of women's literature. This chapter showed how the feminist movements brought to life feminist literature and allowed the feminist literary tradition to form by resurrecting the classical women writings that recorded female attitudes, experiences, and imaginations. In this context, feminist militants in Britain and the US were mainly concerned with ending the patriarchal practices of silencing women's voices and excluding them from the literary history. Hence, the aim was not to find the female entity among the male dominated literary world, but most importantly to create a tradition among women themselves.

We tried to clarify the stages of development of the black woman in the texts of American literature from the mulatta to a fully developed character. The mulatta, who is part-white part-black, is an image that helped aggravate the pain of the colored person as she struggles in the midst of her mixed color which is neither black nor white. The mulatta finds herself fighting a sense of emptiness because she does not know where she belongs and another deeper sense of guilt because she does not know to whom she should be loyal, her black slave mother or her white landowning father.

The discussion covered most of all the contradictions of the feminist theory as it clearly discards a more severe oppression based on racism and classicism which black women suffer. It was because of this ignorance and ethnocentrism that the black women chose womanism as a more intense fight against oppression and prejudice. Thus, Alice Walker's womanist approach seems to be much more appropriate in discussing the texts of the black women as it stands for the wholeness for both male and female groups because the womanist is traditionally a universalist not a separatist.

In the coming chapters discussions of the physical and psychological growth of both female and male characters in Walker's and Hurston's texts will show the focus of the womanist approach on both sexes, although not yet fully framed and contextualized in Hurston's times. Walker does not deny that womanism is first and foremost an ideology about women, but she also stresses the importance of harmonious coexistence between men and women.

Chapter two:

The Quest for Selfhood in Their Eyes Were Watching God

Introduction

One of the objectives of this chapter is to investigate the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts of Hurston and how they had a strong bearing on her artistic output. The study will draw upon the influences of The Harlem Renaissance and its literary tendencies and how Hurston was considered an outsider with outrageous ideas. We will explore the idea that this writer was ahead of her time writing about themes that were so hard for readers as well as critics to comprehend.

Our main concern in this chapter is to present the strategies that Hurston devoted to create a vivid tale of a black woman's quest for selfhood and freedom from the social constraints in her most celebrated novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In creating Janie, the protagonist of this work, Hurston had to invalidate the nineteenth century stereotypes which continued through the twentieth century. Here we will consider the ideology of true womanhood which places black women at the bottom of the social scale.

The protagonist of the novel Janie is a perfect example of what Michael West terms "vital hero". She is a woman who never runs out of possibilities and aspiration for a better future. We will show how her ongoing fascination with the sun and the horizon, the two recurrent motifs used by Hurston, feeds her desire for selfhood and lead her to three marriages and a criminal charge. Hurston also explores the concepts of *ascent and immersion of the quester*. Many critics assume that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the only comprehensive novel in which the protagonist experiences ascent and immersion in the course of a quest.

The language of the black folk which is used to report Janie's conversations with the other characters will be analyzed in this chapter to clarify its role in bridging the gap between Janie and herself first, and Janie and the others. Therefore, language will be considered as a shield which protects women from social withdrawal and loss of identity. Here, again, self-expression will be studied as a vehicle used by the quester to reach selfhood and wholeness.

I-Zora Neale Hurston's Contexts:

Hurston's work is the result of the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts of her life. The thirty years which immediately precedes Hurston's birth are quite important because they encompass one of the most reformatory and confused periods in the history of the United States, here we are talking about the Civil War and its consequences. Hurston was born twenty five years after the Abolishment of Chattel Slavery. This period was very turbulent and marked a change from great optimism during the Radical Reconstruction to strong feelings of betrayal and disillusionment by the end of the century. Although the Emancipation Proclamation of Lincoln was pronounced in 1863, slavery was officially abolished in December of 1865 with the ratification of the thirteenth amendment. The climate during this period was quite stormy with several millions of newly freed black Americans struggling to come to terms with their new status. In the late 1860's and 1870's white supremacist groups like the KKK, The White Brotherhood, Jayhawks, The Pale Faces and The Knights of the White Camelia, emerged in this climate causing terror and fear. The appearance of these racial groups was linked to thousands of recorded lynchings of African Americans. Lynching did not only include hanging, but several aother terrifying modes of torture such as tarring, feathering, and mutilation. The lynchings of the black Americans peaked in the early 1890's, when Hurston was only a toddler. The notorious killings continued through the first half of the twentieth century. Ida B. Wells Barnett (1862-1931) and Walter White (1893-1955) were among the militants who launched anti-lynching crusades. In Charles Chestnutt's "*The Marrow of Tradition*" voting rights were central. It is worth noting that Chestnutt was two generations older than Hurston. The events of the story were based on the famous massacre of African Americans in Wilmington, North Carolina, after the 1898 election. After having exercised their right to vote in the elections, an uncounted number of African Americans were driven from their homes and murdered. The atrocities that the white radicals committed were so terrifying that the demographic in Wilmington decreased. Prior to the massacre, the black Americans represented a large proportioned population that held substantial potential for challenging the white dominance. Chestnutt's work alongside many others like Harper's "*Trial and*

Triumph” and *“Lola Leroy”*, played an important role in portraying the political hindrances that the African Americans were subjected to in the decades following the emancipation.

Hurston was born almost fourteen years after the official dismantling of the Reconstruction, and grew to be an adult in this time of reversal for the African American population. The period between 1890 and 1915 was called by historians such as Rayford W. Logan the lowest and most unfortunate period for the people of color. In the opening segment of *“Jonah’s Gourd Vine”*, a novel which was written within three to four months in 1934, Hurston wrote a plot which displays the inner workings of tenant farming through a comparison between the families that work for Alfred Pearson and the Crittenden household, both undergoing brutal living conditions. The Crittenden household is initially a tenant-farming family but as the situation tightens up they move to working for Shelby plantations, which they expect to be better. The novel records how versions of slavery and exploitations continued to be exercised on the black laborers in the decades following the abolishment of slavery. Other critical view; however, assume that Hurston avoids accusing the system for the misfortune of the black people. Instead, she gives through the character of John Pearson an example of the radical transcendent individual. Through John, Hurston offers, in a Booker T. Washington fashion, a vision of a black man, who escapes the life of tenant farming using his talents, intelligence, hard work, and the support of his white father. John make money and prospers, and spends his entire life enjoying the luxury he made possible through wisdom and resilience. Hurston’s character which was, to some extent, based on her father’s life was greatly inspired by the visionary activism of Washington and his speeches.

W.E.B. Du Bois rose to prominence by the time of the massive migration of the black population from the rural South to the urban North. He brought into existence the Northern perspective of the black issue. At that time, Hurston was still making a name for herself among the Harlem literati, when Washington was a prominent member of the Black Literary Establishment. The divergence in views between Hurston and Washington was inevitable in issues like art, politics, and race problems. Hurston was always a committed republican growing more and more conservative with time, while the masses of African Americans were almost all democratic. Hurston was not a strong supporter of collective action programs like the

NAAC. She was largely influenced by Enlightenment reasoning and believed in individual action as a way to overcome and transcend America's social ills. As an artist, Hurston was a staunch individualistic, even though she wrote within the constraints of the white publishing industry. Du Bois was not a huge fan of Hurston's work. They did not speak for two decades, which is not surprising regarding Du Bois's criteria of good black American art and his preference for organized and collective action to solve the problems of black people. Hurston was caught in the middle of the sexism and racism of the publishing world and the kind of perspective control over her artistic voice that Du Bois and many others tried to impose on her.

When Hurston was writing her best known female character Janie Crawford the protagonist of her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she had to stand face to face with the nineteenth century stereotypes which continued through the twentieth century. True womanhood ideology places black women at the bottom of the social pyramid. The white woman was also poorly portrayed but remained much fortunate than her black counterpart with persistent qualities of bourgeoisie, domesticity, purity, and submissiveness. The true womanhood ideology was opposed and women organized themselves in groups like The New Woman and The Black Women's Club Movement. The leaders of these groups worked primarily to provide working places that would not jeopardize Black Women's sexual virtue. The dominant patriarchal discourse at that time undermined the virtue and purity of black women by portraying them as easy preys for sexual exploitation and abuse. This notion of black womanhood is partly due to centuries of European encounters with helpless black women. It is also due to decades of chattel slavery, which was a rich soil for negative stereotypes to grow and linger.

Hurston wrote about the issue of sexual virtue for black women and the discourses that helped to circumscribe it in many of her works notably *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Janie's recollections of Nanny's sexual abuse during slavery and her mother's rape in times of freedom reveal the narrowness of the historical conception of African American female sexuality. The experiences of Nanny and her daughter guide her into accepting the patriarchal notion of true womanhood and leading her to trying to oppress Janie's sexual expression and silence it. However, Hurston's make up of Janie Crawford's character insists on making sexual expression part of her quest for experience and self-knowledge. Hurston's depiction of the

physical beauty of her protagonist was not new in the black literary establishment aesthetics criteria of the black heroine, but she did not present her as the tragic mulatta character as they did. Janie is not a traditional mulatta, who struggles with her affections and loyalties. She is a woman who does not only defy social codes, but also holds a great pride in her beauty instead of being ashamed of showing it. (Cambridge Companion to Hurston).

II.Hurston and The Harlem Renaissance :

For aspiring black Americans Harlem was the place for hope, dreams, and prosperity; it was the place where black Americans celebrated their blackness and played jazz. Harlem was the site of a social and cultural phenomenon which came to be called The Harlem Renaissance. Although many black artists preferred the Washington DC area in the 1920's ,Harlem was where the black artist should be. Hurston joined the phenomenon at a time when Alain Locke was a new vision of shifting paradigm from prescriptive uplifting literature to literature that represents a renaissance in black American culture. He advocated an art that would show the inner and outer social and cultural changes in the Negro's life. Harlem Renaissance was not all celebration and it was certainly not free from debates of how to establish an authentic black art.

The male African American scholarship of Hurston is largely invested in examining whether or not she was an appropriate image to represent The Harlem Renaissance and African American modernism. Langston Hughes writes in *The Big Sea*: ***“Of this “niggerati”, Zora Neale Hurston was certainly the most amusing. Only to reach a wider audience, need she ever write books- because she is a perfect book of entertainment herself”*** (Hughes cited by Perdigao: 129). The comment of Hughes shows the celebrity status of Hurston rather than regarding her as a serious writer. Richard Wright and Alan Locke, on the other hand, questioned her talent as a writer and her maturity to write socially and politically relevant texts. The doubts surrounding Hurston's fiction originate from her neglect of the suffering of the black people at that time. Instead of mourning the status of the black community, Hurston chose to celebrate the traditions and folklore of her people, this fact made her work sound completely irrelevant to the original combative stance of The Harlem Renaissance. In this context Walker writes in her essay *Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View*:

“Her critics disliked even the “rags” on her head. (They seemed curiously incapable of telling the difference between an African American queen and Aunt Jemima.) They disliked her apparent sensuality: the way she

*tended to marry or not marry men, but enjoyed them anyway- while never missing a beat in her work [...] No wonder her presence was always a shock. Though almost everyone agreed she was a delight, not everyone agreed such audacious black delight was permissible, or, indeed, quite the proper image for the race."*²

(Walker, In Search: 88-89).

Walker argues that it is only in the sixties that people started to understand that woman who wears colorful cloths on her head and care about authenticity and roots. By the sixties it was no shame that a black writer received financial support from the "white folks", and nobody cared if marriage ended in divorce either.

Du Bois clung to his vision that black artists must be political and represent the black people positively. However, younger artists wanted to end the old fashion and try new perspectives. For instance, Wallace Thurman (1902-1934) opposed prize giving and official grooming of artists, such as the case of Hurston. Claud McKay (1889-1948) shared Thurman's opinion that art should not be linked to a specific agenda. Therefore he was at odds with Du Bois who claimed that all art was propaganda. Thurman and McKay maintained that the artist who writes according to or for a certain political agenda had already sold out his authentic artistic expression. Locke, on the other hand, believed that politics or political thinking was an important part of the Negro's life. He advocated a form of art that presents the life of the black people following an approach that perpetuates political stand points. Author and critic George Schugler (1895-1977) went further than that and said that there was no such thing as Negro art. Instead he produced guidelines for literary production specifying the criteria for better representation of black people and their experiences. Langston Hughes held the Negro Manifesto and believed firmly that the Negro art did indeed exist and that it was up to the artists to adjust their art and decide how it would be represented. He did not accept the prescriptions of Locke and Du Bois and expressed his indifference to what people think of his art as long as it was generated genuinely from his experiences and his vision as a Negro. Locke insisted that the Harlem Renaissance literature would be of the Negro rather than about the Negro problem.

The Cambridge Companion to Zora Neale Hurston reported Locke's assertion that the black artists "... **Turn therefore in the other direction to the elements of truest social portraiture and discover in the artistic self-experience of the Negro to-day a new figure on the national canvas and a new force in the foreground of affairs... So far as he is culturally articulate, we shall let the Negro speak for himself**" (29). This statement of Locke does not seem to be at odds with Hurston's freedom writing. However, she was fighting to find her voice in a white male dominated publishing industry and the male dominated black literary establishment and patronage. Cheryl Wall assumes in *The Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995) that Locke's statement was an over statement for male writers and a contradiction of the reality of the experience of the black women writers. Richard Wright (1908-1960), Hurston's contemporary and antagonist who wrote a blistering review of TE, became prominent in the 1930s. He discussed in many essays the criteria of true Negro art, and like his contemporaries McKay, Fausset, and Hughes, he left the US looking for greater rights and artistic freedom.

The New Negro Movement helped Hurston launch her career as a writer. Although the great depression was a time of loss and despair for most Americans, it was a period of prosperity for Hurston's work as five of her seven books were published during the decade following the October 1929 Stock Market Crash. Hurston and other Harlem Renaissance authors worked for the FWP which included a section for folklore where they collected songs, stories and traditions. During these hard times of the American history, Hurston was harshly criticized for neglecting major aspects of the American life such as the radical social oppression, and focusing instead on folklore and hoodoo. Despite the criticism, *Mules and Men*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and other writings helped to illuminate the black Americans with the ways in which Hurston's characters live and how they celebrate life in the midst of social hostility and racial prejudice. In *Mules and Men*, for instance, Hurston uses the blues as a form of oral expression and strategy for survival in the rural South. The blues was not a spot of interest for Hurston alone, but it was also the theme of discussion for many of her Renaissance contemporaries like Baraka and Ellison. The latter defined the blues as: "**an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a**

near-tragic, near-comic lyricism” (The Cambridge Companion: 31). For Baraka, the blues is much more than just a coping or chronicling strategy of a black person escaping the pain of racism; it has historical, political and social significances of the African American experience. Scholars and historians trace the history of the blues back to the aftermath of the civil war. In literature it was a musical form used a mode of expression for the black people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The blues *“captured the mood for the young black men caught up in the Scottsboro saga”* (31).

By the end of WWII, American economy came to full recovery from The Great Depression. The black American who served in three major wars became more and more aware of the necessity to establish civil rights which would insure a dignified citizenship. The voices of the African Americans rose up high and men like Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., both assassinated became the corner stones of decades of struggle for equality and freedom. Hurston died in 1960, just as America was facing what has come to be known as the most turbulent decade in the twentieth century. It would be marked by murders, assassination and revolutions in the US and around the globe.

Setting Hurston within the Negro Renaissance tradition is a key addition to this study. It does not only give a clear overview of her political and ideological orientations as a black person in the American society of early twentieth century, but also explains Hurston’s rebellious attitudes which are reflected in her writings and her female characters, notably Janie in TE. The art produced during The Harlem Renaissance shaped Hurston’s artistic sense and defined her as one of very few colored women writers who chose not to follow the flow of mainstream Negro Art. Instead, those women wrote their own feminized version of the black American’s life.

III. Janie's Quest for Selfhood in TE:

III.1 Heroic Vitalism:

Hurston, the outrageous black writer, was a very spiritual woman who was deeply offended and outraged by the "othering" practiced on her for being a free speaker and writer. Her spirituality paved the way for her to engage in a very excruciating struggle for voice and selfhood. Janie in TE was in a way or another the rendering of Hurston's aspirations into a character with a very intense personality. Hull comments on the spirituality of the writer and says:

"If being spiritual means meditating to make connections with the larger self that is part and parcel of the greatest whole, and trying to see, feel and know our oneness with it; if being spiritual means going to therapy in order to feel and heal our own pain so that we can identify with and heal the pain of others [...] in whatever way we can; if it means seeking transcendent merging with the whole so that we no longer name as "other" those who are different from us and those whose lifescrpts challenge us to get outside of our own comfort zones [...] if being spiritual means all of these kinds of things, then surely it is a more than legitimate way to participate in a struggle."

(Hull in Plant: 03).

In the introduction to his book *Bloom's Modern Interpretations*, Harold Bloom praised TE as a unique work not in its kind but in the superb manner in which it addresses issues. The novel affirms greater repression on women compared to men. Repression, according to Bloom, is the repression in Freud's sense; the unconscious but purposeful forgetting. Freud claims that women forget the things they do not want to remember. Likewise, they remember what they do not want to forget. He believes that the dream is the truth by which they act. Therefore, Janie in TE is a typical

example for women of any race. Janie is the spiritual heroine who attempts courageously to confirm her individuality and selfhood in contexts which continue to be male-dominated. Thus, the contexts of the novel modify the representation of Janie. This character became a prominent figure in a long tradition of similar representations in American literature. Samuel Richardson and Doris Lessing are among the authors who extended a tradition that, only rarely, could portray the strong woman who begins her journey as an oppressed and weak woman and uses her inner strength to surpass the pain and become better and stronger. Bloom asserts that Hurston's subtle sense of limitation, imposed on her by her black male contemporaries and the white publishers, was reflected in the limitation that Janie was obliged to live in. This limitation is represented in the character of her grandmother who loves her the most and fears for her excessively. Nanny is a former slave who dreams of making something out of her daughter and granddaughter, something other than "miles", the inevitable fate of black women. Nanny's dream was probably too strong that it caused plenty of insecurity to Janie leading to two disastrous marriages. However, as Bloom comments, Janie never forgets the pathos of her grandmother's excellent displacement of hope.

Power in Hurston's portrayal of Janie is always a potential and the desire to live is insatiable. Although Hurston, Dreiser and Lawrence differ in their temperaments, Bloom suggests that they all share an affinity with heroic vitalism. Her art is similar to theirs in that she loves beauty and exalts it; the beauty that tests reality. The character of Janie is close to Dreiser's Carrie and Lawrence's Ursula in her persistence and strong will to survive in one's own fashion. Hurston's philosophy in the novel and the title of Janie's quest is: "*That only that day dawns to which we are alive*" (Bloom, 2008:3). In TE, the sun is the center of everything. Hurston's fascination with the sun is paralleled with Lawrence's: "*They sat on the boarding house porch and saw the sun plunge into the same crack in the earth from which the night emerged*" (TE, 50). The unstoppable sense of perpetual possibilities transforms Janie into a rebel who escapes Nanny's safety first principle and eventually leads to decades of misfortune with Joe Starks and the beautiful experience with Tea Cake. Despite the positive sense which accompany Hurston's ongoing philosophy of the sun, it seems that the sun is both a grace and a doom: "*But to live in a way that starts with the sun is to become pragmatically doom-eager, since mere*

life is deprecated in contrast to the possibility of glory, or life more abundant, rather than Nanny's dream of a refuge from exploitation" (3). Later in the novel, the heroic vitalism of Janie becomes more evident as she breaks the chains of what is to be and what is to be done. The most striking irony in TE is that Janie's marriage to Tea Cake was her key to freedom from men's bondages and Nanny's safety first doctrine. Hurston chose to end Janie's quest with the tragic illness of her beloved Tea Cake. Her vitalism manifests itself again when she decides to kill the man she loves the most in self defense. The sun has to kill the night to survive another day, although day and night have been forever inseparable. In her quest for life she had to take a life. Janie ends love and life to create to create a vaster possibility for more life. In his analysis of the vitalist hero Michael West says:

"Estranged from his lower class or petty bourgeois origins, the heroic vitalist feels divided against himself, a fact that he sometimes elaborates into a doctrine of double personality. This split is augmented by an apparent dichotomy in his perceived world. He hungers to embrace the universe in its totality but would rather accept its differences than sacrifice any for metaphysical unity. Balked of a conventional religious belief, he borrows orthodox tropes and tries to elaborate a new mythology from evolutionary nature."

(West:473)

Similar to West's definition of a vitalist hero, Janie struggles with herself as a woman and with her other self as a lover; however, her love for the sun and her fascination with the perpetual possibilities for a new day defeated love in celebration of a new life. Hurston herself was a vitalist. She had a unique sense of power which was not associated with any political thought or philosophy, with the known feminist modes or with the quest of those who wanted to create a unique black aesthetics. Bloom describes her as a larger than life woman, who stands on the same line as the Wife of Bath. In response to the photographs of Carl Van Vetchten she said in a strong

and vivid expression of her philosophy: *“I love myself when I’m laughing, and then again when I’m looking mean and impressive”* (04).

II.2. Ascent and Immersion of the Quester:

“The immersion narrative is fundamentally an expression of a ritualized journey into a symbolic South, in which the protagonist seeks those aspects of tribal literacy that ameliorate, if not obliterate, the conditions imposed by solitude. The conventional immersion narrative ends almost paradoxically, with the questing figure located in or near the narrative’s most oppressive social structure but free in the sense that he has gained or regained sufficient tribal literacy to assume the mantle of articulate Kinsman. ”

(Palvic:18)

Before Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, TE is probably the sole true coherent African American narrative of ascent and immersion. This is due to Hurston’s efforts to create a heroine who is searching for liberty. Her use of the questing heroine freed her from the compulsory traditional models and tropes of ascent and immersion. Hurston’s discourse is neither fully new nor feminine. Janie ascends to her house “full ah thoughts” after a ritualized trip with Tea Cake which immersed her into the dirty lands of the Everglades. Her journey in (the muck), representing the stage of immersion in the narrative, was a ground for spiritual and private ritualized experiences. Janie’s approach as the narrator or as an articulate figure who acknowledges tribal tropes and her control of her own history *“is a familiar and valued final sitting for a primary voice in Afro-American narratives”* (Stepito in Bloom, 2008:07). Ascent and immergence, as a natural part of a person’s development, was explored by Richard Wright and advocated as a “must” in the African American novel by Du Bois. However, TE was new in many ways. The narrative takes place in a historical place with an all black town, a new element, with no railroad trains. This town created by Hurston is a perfect place for the authentic African American tribal rituals which fascinated her throughout her life. The town that

Hurston imagined did not acknowledge the slogan of “forty acres and a mule”, and was bereft of the slave cabins from the past. In this new town the heroine is a woman who, as Stepto says, seeks freedom, selfhood, voice and living but is hardly guided by, or hunted by Sejourner Truth or Harriet Tubman, let alone Frederick Douglass. But that world is actually a fresh expression of a history of assault.

Janie’s first two husbands Logan Killicks and Jody Starks and the configured space which they want to impose on Janie provide the needed social structure in the novel. Additionally, the conversations between Janie and Phoeby in the present allow Hurston the ability to control and present the communal and archetypal aspects of Janie’s quest and final attitude. After Phoeby listens to Janie’s stories she feels guilty for judging her before knowing the whole story and tells Janie that she will let no one criticize her at her hearing. The posture of Phoeby reveals the narrative’s great effort to emphasize group consciousness. Hurston elevates the relationship of Phoeby and Janie from a mere story teller-listener relationship to a sisterhood suggesting a unique affinity among woman kind at large. Stepto believes that Hurston creates an illusion that Janie won her voice in the end along with everything else. He assumes that the story undercuts this illusion not because of its content but because of its narrative strategies. Hurston’s use of an omniscient third person narrator instead of a first person narrator, implies that Janie has not really won her voice and her selfhood after all. The omniscient narrator cannot see Janie clearly and speaks about her outright. Janie’s voice is silenced and replaced by a voice which speaks on her behalf to tell her story. Stepto thinks that: *“Hurston is genuinely caught in the dilemma of how she might both govern and exploit the autobiographical impulses that partially direct her creation of Janie”* (08). Despite this fact, Stepto acknowledges TE as a seminal novel in the history of the African American letters. TE anticipates the historical consciousness of this tradition and helps define its narrative forms. The example of TE suggests a hero beyond the patters of ascent and immersion represented by the journey of Janie. The new hero achieves authorial voice and control of his personal history. Stepto observes that the narrative strategies of TE are strikingly similar to *Invisible Man*, he adds that: *“Janie is quite possible more of a blood relative to Ellison’s narrator than either the male chauvinist or feminist readers of the tradition would care to contemplate”* (08). Hurston was not a female writer who quested to propel a

feminist tradition, but an author who struggled between the form and the content to address her readers.

Janie's ascent comes also with Tea Cake, who helps her come out of her widowed state and ruins of her relationship with Starks. Janie was attracted by Tea Cake's courage to break the social codes, his brilliant performances, and his love and clever insight into Janie's mind. Tea Cake accompanies Janie out of her dark place as the late mayor's wife, to a new and lively encounter with life experiences both socially and personally.

III. The Role of Language in Shaping the Self:

The protagonist of *TE* Janie sat on a porch and told her story. By doing so, she used language as a bridge to reach the essence of her experiences and realize her identity and selfhood. Marry Helen Washington discussed women relationship to language in the novel and the ways they liberated them from the loss of identity. She believes, unlike the common critical belief, that *TE* was not the tale of a woman in a folk community but the story of a woman outside the folk community. While most of the feminist critical views assume eagerly that *TE* is an expression of female power, Washington believes it is a novel that represents women's exclusion from power, specifically the power of oral speech. Most of the contemporary critics postulate that Janie is an articulate voice in the black folk tradition, and that she is a woman who attains selfhood which leads her to the active participation in the black traditions. This could be true, but according to Washington, it is important to look at the main character of Hurston's first novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* reverend John Pearson, before claiming that Janie is an articulate heroine.

Unlike Janie's problematic relationship with the community, Pearson is assured and strong in his community. Pearson lives in an Alabama town, where Janie migrates as well. He finds out the power associated with his preaching voice early on in the novel and uses it. He has a remarkable ability of controlling and manipulating the language of the folk through which he obtains a strong position within his community. Pearson's relationships with women bridge the gap between him and his community and lead him to learning and discovering the possibilities of his voice. On the other hand, Janie's relationships with men split her from her community and deprive her from her voice. Even John's relationship with his best friend is far more complex and mature than Janie's friendship with Phoebe. Therefore, Washington concludes, it is hard to claim an articulate hero posture for Janie in *TE*.

Janie was alienated by her community because of her extraordinary duty. Her relationship with Phoebe, appearing as distinct from the community encloses them in a private connection which saves Janie from the jealousy of the other women. Janie, like the other women in her community, is prevented from participating in the oral tradition of the community. Voice in *TE* is represented not as a collective characteristic but a commodity of the black men. Washington agrees with critic

Margaret Homans that “ *the possibility that women are excluded categorically from the language of the dominant discourse should help us to be aware of the inadequacy of language, its inability to represent female experience, its tendency not only to silence women but to make women complicitous in that silence*” (Washington in Bloom, 2003: 10). Janie’s real plight is her position as both a subject and an object. The writer could only save her protagonist from this paradox in the frame of the story where Janie is talking to another woman, Phoebe Watson. As object in TE Janie is passive, deprived from speech, and made powerless by her relationships with her three husbands and the authorial strategies of Hurston. Again, the comparison between John’s role as subject aspiring to a heroic posture and Janie as a passive woman or object could be helpful in understanding how Janie is trapped in this paradoxical position.

Sexuality in these two novels is discovered by Janie and John early in their lives, as a factor in their growth and maturity. The pear tree being pollinated by bees is used by Hurston as a symbol of Janie’s sexuality in the beginning of the book when Janie is only fifteen years old. In this scene Janie is a beautiful young girl lying under a pear tree: “*She saw a dust bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this is marriage! She has been summoned to behold a revelation*” (TE: 15). The scene leaves Janie eager for answers. Washington observes that Janie’s romantic fantasies at a very early age and the way it ends in brutal punishment by her grandmother is not likely to result in any growth in Janie’s personality. John’s sexual experiences are not observed by any adult and so he is not subjected to the humiliation or punishment that Janie was subject to. John’s relationships with girls as an adolescent, unlike Janie’s painful and bleak experiences, confirm his sense of power.

Janie’s image of herself as a blossom changes her figuratively and literally and prepares her for her marriages. Janie’s answers come in the form of two marriages in which men control her life and direct the plot of the narrative. Janie struggles with her first husband Logan and resists him, but her second husband Starks was much stronger than her. Starks buys, sells, and prescribes Janie’s relationships with everyone in Eatonville. He even controls the way she should dress or do her hair. By introducing the character of Starks in the novel, Hurston initiates Janie’s quest to free herself from

male domination. Furthermore, the language used by Hurston and Starks' demeanor reinforce Janie's posture as an object. We see Janie's arrival to Eatonville, as readers, as seen by the men sitting on the porch. Janie and the other women in town are not only prohibited from participating in the traditional ceremonies and rituals of the community, but they are also the subject of men's talk, gossips, and jokes. Having one's body treated like an object is a very diminishing experience for women and men equally. When she confronts her husband Jody in the store in front of the other men and calls "change of life", which usually refers to a woman's menopause, her words are like bullets which cut through his flesh and render him subject to the same exposure and humiliation a woman would feel in his place. In this key scene of the novel Jody swaps positions with Janie and becomes the "object" of gaze, pity and scorn. Janie has robbed him of the illusion of perpetually irresistible maleness that all men cherish. When Janie speaks for the first time on behalf of the other women, she delivers a subtle speech about the restraints of the male-dominated community:

"Sometimes God gits familiar wid us women folks too and talk his inside business. He told me how surprised he was 's bout y'all turning out so smart after him makin' yuh different; and how surprised y'all is going tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do."

(TE: 91)

Washington suggests that Janie's use of speech does not lead her to liberation or power, but to self-division and further submission to her status as object. Janie begins self-observation as her marriage to Jody goes to the worse. She imagined her shadow throwing itself on the ground in submission to Jody while she was sitting under a shady tree enjoying the wind blowing through her hair and clothes. This image is a clear example of Janie's psychic split between her free-self, portrayed by the image of the blowing wind through her hair and clothes, and her submissive-self as seen in the shadows that she imagined. Conger thinks that: *"We are likely to perceive others as a unity while maintaining a psychic split within ourselves. The split is the shadow of our embodied self [...] embodiment represents our capacity to bring diverse*

internal and external elements into an organization called the self" (Conger, 199). In contrast to Janie's self-split after she confronted her husband, John who is also trapped in his marriage with his second wife Hattie experiences self-unification rather than the self-division of Janie. Confronting his life with Hattie, John experiences a change in himself and begins to visit old friends. His confrontation does not lead him to imagination like, Janie, but to action and liberation.

After Janie discovers the power of speech which allows her stand up to Jody, Hurston further makes her objectified by not being able to take action. After Jody's death, Janie looks at herself in the mirror, tears off the kerchief she was forced to wear and lets down her beautiful hair: "*She took careful stock of herself, then combed her hair and tied it back up again*" (TE: 80). When Janie is finally independent, we do not see her autonomy as a subject but rather a visual object. When she examines herself through the looking glass, she does not enjoy the freedom of letting her hair down or the sensual pleasure of looking at her beauty. She looks at herself in assessment and judgment, she cares a lot about the image that people see when they look at her. In this scene we learn that Janie is actually aware of her divided self. Barbara Jonson notes that: "*Once Janie is able to identify the split between her inside and outside selves, incorporating and articulating her own sense of self-division, she develops an increasing ability to speak*" (cited by Washington in Bloom, 2003: 13). Washington does not agree with Jonson's optimistic view of Janie's ability to speak and articulate herself. She comes to different conclusions and suggests that Hurston continues to subvert Janie's speech, silencing her when she needs to speak. Even when Hurston is exploring Janie's consciousness, what we as readers really hear are the voices and views of men in her internal speech. When Tea Cake comes into Janie's life, his name and his voice take over the narrative almost twice as Janie's thoughts and actions. Washington thinks that from then on the narrative is Tea Cake's tale, the only reason for Janie's account of her life to Phoebe being to vindicate Tea Cake's name, insisting on Tea Cake's innocence as well as his central place in her life.

Feminist critics claim that women are silenced in texts by women. There are areas in Hurston's text where Janie is curiously silence. Probably the most striking example is when Tea Cake beats her. Janie, unlike the reader's expectations, is silence and her reactions to the beating unknown. We hear about this incident through the eyes of the community and the other men who envy Tea Cake for having such a tender

woman whose flesh is too delicate that all the bruises show on her skin. Janie's silence and repression are so thorough that all that remains of her is other men's desires.

The passages which represent Janie's internal speech and consciousness begin with marking the internal change in her. These passages gradually or suddenly turn to be the male character's space where he becomes the subject of speech. At the end of these parts, which are supposedly devoted to revealing Janie's inner life and changes, men's voices become dominant and absolute. Even in Janie's most delicate life-turning periods, just before and after Jody's death, Hurston does not seem to give enough attention to Janie. In the long paragraph when we learn about Janie's change in the months following Jody's death, we are abruptly distracted when Janie speaks about Hezekiah and how he emulates Jody. This shift in the paragraph brings Jody back to the text and wipes out Janie's account of growth and self-discovery: *"At this point, the paragraph shifts its focus from Janie and her growing sense of independence to Hezekiah and his imitation of Jody, describing Hezekiah in a way that evokes Jody's presence and obliterates Janie"* (14). The humorous end of the paragraph tells us how Hezekiah needs to drink liquor to keep up with the fact that a woman is running the store. This part does not only eliminate Janie as the subject of the text and replaces her by a male subject, but also shows Janie's absorption into the male defined "troublesome" women.

Washington agrees with Stepto in that Hurston had deprived Janie from speaking out by using the third person omniscient rather than the first person as a narrative voice. The comparison between the male protagonist of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and TE suggests that Hurston had mixed feelings about granting a woman like Janie, who is rebelling against dictated rules of the male-dominated society, free and male-free voice. As Stepto points out, Janie's silence is remarkable in the courtroom scene where she is supposed to tell her own story with Tea Cake. At a time when Janie is supposed to have completely regained her power off speech and self-expression, Hurston silences her and we learn about her story with Tea Cake entirely in the third person voice. Again, Janie's voice is only heard in the frame of her conversation with her friend Phoebe.

Washington goes back to the similar courtroom scene in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* Where John is in trial because Hattie, his estranged second wife, accuses him of

adultery. The black community and his friends take a hostile posture against him and testify in favor of Hattie. We learn through John's voice that the system is all white. Despite the hostility of his community and the difficult situation he finds himself in, John remains silent, not because he was made silent, but because he chose to. John's consciousness allows him to see his surroundings with critical eyes and to resolve to silence in order to defy the hypocrisy and racism of the system and to protect his black folks despite their hostility against him. Janie in TE is not allowed the insight and consciousness nor the loyalty of John in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. In the scene where Mrs. Turner insults Janie on racial grounds, she is almost silent as usual, defending herself only with the cold attitude in resistance to the woman's bigotry and intolerance. In the courtroom Janie is alienated by her black community, she is vindicated but still an outsider. John, on the other hand, is the hero, the traditional man in possession of power.

Unlike Janie's voice, John's is a tool of power and influence rather than one of self-expression. He exploits his voice to his benefit. He uses the beauty and strength of his speech to become the most famous and influential preacher in the area. John relentlessly searches for power manhood but fails to achieve maturity before his sudden death. The turbulent ending of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* reveals Hurston's discomfort with the values of the community that the traditional male hero represents and with the social privileging of oral expression over the individuals inner growth and maturity. Therefore, Janie is the utter antithesis of John who claims external power and influence at the expense of his inner development: "*She assumes a heroic status not by externals, but by her own struggle for self-definition, for autonomy, for liberation from the illusions that other have tried to make her live by or that she has submitted to herself*" (16).

Despite the fact that Janie's culture believes in the importance of orality, Janie's final discourse in TE reveals her doubt in the relevance of oral speech:

*" Talkin' don't amount tuh uh hill uh beans
when you can't do nothing else [...] Phoebe you
got tuh go there tuh know. Yo papa and mamma
and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh.*

They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about living fuh theyselves ."(TE: 210)

Washington notes that Janie's final comment which asserts that experiencing things is more important and enriching than talking is a strong but implicit criticism of the black community's cultural assertion that speech is more important than inner growth and self-definition. Hurston's language which is associated with men in TE and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is almost free from any interiority or intimacy. Hurston rarely shows men in the process of growing or learning how to know about themselves. Language for men in both narratives is a game of power, superiority, scorn and influence.

In contrast to men's attitudes towards life and experience, Janie's life is about experiencing relationships. The male characters in these two novels, Logan, Jody, Tea Cake and John Pearson are static and unchangeable. While the women, Janie and Phoebe, allow experiences to change and teach them new things which may alter their visions and attitudes towards themselves and their community. Hurston's discomfort with the male-dominated way of seeing the world is further confirmed by the way she chose to end John's tale: "***John, who seems almost constitutionally unfitted for self-examination, is killed at the end of the novel by a train, that very symbol of male power he has been seduced by all his life***" (Washington in Bloom, 2003:17)

It is no secret that Hurston is interested in the folklore and traditions of the black community. Vladimir Propp studied the relations between folklore and fiction and noted that we should be conscious not to think that plots are direct reflections of a given social order. Propp believes that plots: "***rather emerge out of the conflict, the contradictions of different social orders as they succeed or replace one another [...] The difficult coexistence of different orders of historical reality in the long period of transition from one to the other***" (17). The tension that Propp explains in this comment is well reflected in Hurston's plots. This tension in the social order of a society in transition from male-dominated traditions and ways of living to a more egalitarian society in which women grow not only in their bodies, but also in their minds. Both narratives end in ambiguous postures of the protagonists. John dies lonesome, consumed by the ideals of his community, and paralyzed to understand the reasons for his spiritual and psychological plight. Janie, on the other hand, who returns

to the community she initially left, is trapped in her silence and interiority representing another structure of confinement. In the scene where Janie is alone and watching the pictures of love and light on the wall, she seems like the audience of a play. She ***“pulls in the horizon and drapes it over her shoulders and calls in her soul to come and see”***(17). Washington believes that this part of the novel is deceptive because the language gives the reader the illusion that Janie has finally found herself and grew up. The horizon, thus, is the outside world of Janie. It is the world of carelessness, adventure, and trial that Janie chooses to experience in her quest for a world where possibilities are available for women, a world where she can meet new people and annihilate the communal values that make people hollow and without souls. If the horizon is really that, then Janie is cancelling all the possibilities by pulling in the horizon. In the end of the novel Janie is a landowner with a considerable bank of the scorn of people who assume her further alienation from the society. Janie is left alone without a man and without plans of how she will use her wealth and potentials in her new, but probably not permanently manless life.

Hurston in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* was clearly in control of her questing traditional male hero. However, TE presented a problem for Hurston which is how to deal with woman hero in quest for her selfhood and voice. Washington believes that Hurston could not solve this problem in her narrative. Hurston paves the way of autonomy and self-realization for Janie. She gives her the ability to put on the outward wrapping of male power. Janie wears overalls, goes to the muck, learns to shoot fire and does it even better than Tea Cake. This rebellion, as portrayed by Hurston, does not only change Janie but also puts Phoebe on the tracks of liberation and self-discovery. Hurston resisted the script of romance and insisted on escaping it by making Janie kill Tea Cake although as Washington notes that he exists in death in a far more mythical and exalted way than in life. Rachael Blau Du Lessis assumes that: ***“when the narrative resolves itself in the repression of romance and reassertion of quest, the result is a narrative that is critical of those patriarchal rules that govern women and deny them a role outside of the boundaries of patriarchy”*** (18).

Janie's quest for freedom and selfhood reformed her society simply by resisting its decaying values. Her status as an outsider and a woman who is alienated by other women secure a heroic posture for Janie in modernist standards. Her inability to integrate in her society keeps her on the outside looking inside the society and

observing its interest in externals and lack of self reflection. Janie's rebellion brings change into her life and the life of her friend Phoebe as her story becomes a compelling example for any quester who reads her tale.

Conclusion

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston presents a shockingly unusual female character who contradicts the white ideology of true womanhood and the familiar stereotypical black female characters. The brief survey of Hurston's contexts showed the hostility she faced from prominent Renaissance contemporaries like Du Bois and Locke, mainly because she refused the calls for collective action. She believed that every person white or black should lead an individualistic struggle to transcend his social conditions. Her critics assume that she was preoccupied with folklore and voodoo while she should have been an active voice in the combative literary productions of The Harlem Renaissance. However, nowadays she is considered as one of the writers who played an important role in preserving and celebrating the beauty of the black culture, linguistically and artistically.

In portraying the quest of her protagonist for selfhood and freedom, Hurston produced an exhilarating tale of a vitalist heroine who escapes, marries three times, and kills to save her life. To perpetuate the sense of vitalism, Hurston used two motifs: the sun and the horizon. Janie's fascination with these natural elements are mirrored in her final encounter with death as she kills her beloved husband to have a new chance at living, in much the same way as the sun erases the night to bring a new day. The horizon in the end is all hers as she finds herself alone in a highland far from danger with a new and most appreciated life.

The language of Janie is another narrative strategy that we shed the light on. Hurston used the simple pastoral language of the South to keep her characters authentic and believable. The use of language or communication with other people especially women was a technique that Hurston implied to drag Janie out of solitude and into a deeper understanding of herself and the others.

Chapter three:

Psychoanalytic patterns of Shaping the “Self” and Epistolarity in *The Color Purple*

Introduction

In the second chapter of this research work in which typology of characters was utilized to circumscribe the theme of the quest for selfhood, we will discuss in details and with examples the character of Celie from Alice Walker's classic *The Color Purple*. The study will cover the journey of Celie from a neglected orphan child to a free self-confident woman. We will start with a brief account of the circumstances in which the novel was written where we will uncover some of Alice Walker's concerns as a writer and social activist. These concerns will be explored as Walker tries to convey a social and moral message through this novel. Alice Walker focuses on Celie's growth both psychologically and physically in much the same way Hurston did when she chronicled the life of Janie and other female character in *TE*; therefore, we will try to make use of some of Lacan's and Freud's theories concerning the interrelationships between physical and psychological growth and apply them to the growth of Celie.

We will investigate the narcissistic model and psychoanalytic pattern of growth in *The Color Purple* and their impact on the quest for selfhood that the novel's protagonist pursues. This analysis will focus mainly on the mirror scene in the novel and Celie's narcissistic friendship with another woman, Shug Avery. Throughout this specific part of the chapter we will try to show how these two elements represent key factors in the eventual self-fulfillment of Celie. We will also put into evidence the way Celie's discovery of herself-worth affects the other women and men in her life and brings them together in the very human quest for love, freedom and happiness regardless of sex.

The next important element in this chapter will be the epistolary form of the novel and how Walker used it as a literary vehicle to voice the most intimate thoughts and feelings of a black woman. Epistolarity will be investigated as a booster of consciousness as the protagonist of the novel uses writing as her only form of communication with another entity. We will try to clarify how writing is used by Alice Walker as a refuge that liberates Celie from her loneliness and sense of guilt, guiding her through her quest for selfhood.

I. The Framework of The Color Purple:

Alice Walker was an activist during the social events in the civil rights demonstrations in the 1960's. Her feminism and ideas concerning the issues of African American women are seen in her literary works notably her Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Color Purple* (1982)(Hubert: 2001, 03). Similar to her earlier works like *Meridian*, *The Color Purple* is the story of a young African American woman in the 1930's who lives in the conservative pastoral community of Georgia in the South of the United States. Celie is tortured, raped and emotionally abused for almost thirty years of her life before she finally comes to terms with herself and her world. Celie, who is only fourteen in the beginning of the novel, was born into a hostile, racist and sexist community with a fate that may not be surprising for a young woman of color in that period of the American history. Being a rejected girl by everyone she knows and after having been deprived from her beloved sister Nettie, she turns to God through the letters she writes. The epistolary characteristic of the novel is not only an external feature related to Walker's style but it is also an important element in the course of the psychological development of the protagonist and her ability of expressing her feelings and growth into a woman. Moreover, the epistolarity of the novel allows the reader to get inside Celie's psyche and see through her eyes (Grebe:2009,04). In Abel's terms *The Color Purple* is, ***"...unquestionably a novel with a social message, but the larger issues in it concern a woman's personal struggle for freedom, and how she accomplishes this in a society where women are looked upon as inferior"***(Abel:1989,04).

Walker's works give voice to those who cannot speak, usually rural, simple and poor black women. Those women have been deprived from the right to decide and choose by their religious leaders, the harsh economy, racism, which is embedded in the laws, and the men they choose or find themselves forced to spend their lives with. The heroines of Alice Walker represent clearly not only the ways they undergo the struggle but also the power, hope and courage which cannot be taken from them. In this context Marry Donnelly notes that: ***"this process of identifying and celebrating resistance plays a central role in Walker's larger project: recognizing the value and individuality of each person, the distinct patterns of experience and soul that mark each person as individual"***(Donnelly: 2008, 08).

In addition, Walker gives the reader a mystical and spiritual experience of nature since her very early works, producing what the eighteenth century Romantics would call the “sublime”. She gave nature “...*sensory perception and rational thought, nature becomes a force, a character on its own right with a soul, and with whom characters can have a rich, fulfilling relationships*” (Donnelly:2008,08). Shug Avery in *The Color Purple* is fascinated by the color purple in nature: “*Naw, she say. Not vain, just wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.*”(CP, 114). This example points out the strong connection that Walker attempts to establish between nature, spirituality and identity. Donnelly points out that: “the strength of her work lies in the interweaving of her concerns, her absolute insistence that all persons and the natural world want and demand justice. She is a passionate and gifted advocate for their cause”(Donnelly:2008,08). Bloom in his *Modern Critical Views* (2007) insists that Walker’s concerns are usually identified as ethnic, gender and black naturalist by essayists and critics like Daniel W. Ross and Lauren Berlant.

Walker calls herself “author and medium”, according to Bloom, because she considers herself a representative of an era and not an idiosyncratic writer. She displays a sensibility that is very close to the spirit of the age. Some critics, however, view her work with skepticism and questioned why she always chooses: “...*kind, loving women who triumph in spite of the odds, played off against weak, self-centered, violent men*”(Bloom, 2007:05). Alice Walker expressed her interest in detailing the social relationships and fighting the double standards. Bloom quoted her: “...*I wanted to explore the relationship between men and women and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as an expression of their masculinity. Why are women so easily tramps when men are heroes for engaging in the same activity? Why do women stand for this?*”(Bloom, 05-06)

In her book *Woman Who Owns You?*, Prasanna Sree discusses the problem of neglect and underestimation that women writers face whenever they write to address their cause. She emphasizes that the sisterhood of women and their bonding to address common interests is a very efficient weapon to fight the patriarchal canon and define the woman’s worth, she wrote:

"Much of the world literature has been dominated by a canon that dismissed women's writings. The role of women was most often to inspire rather

than to create. But in due course women have proved themselves. Women's literature has evolved to show common experiences, a sense of sisterhood that questions the recurring face of patriarchy. Unlike any other women, black women in order to survive and empower had to generate their own definition and in due course tried to gain their lost humanity through their art and literature. The writings of black writers is an evolutionary process. Their function is to illuminate the lives of black people. Women were subject to all kinds of physical and psychological torment. On the social strata they were given the lowest positions and were subjugated on the basis of their blackness and femaleness. The double jeopardy has created a complex , painful, and dehumanizing reality in which they have struggled for both freedom and selfhood." (Sree:2008,14-15).

Sree believes that enslavement and racism were not only a source of misfortune for black women , but also the road to salvation. Alice walker's CP demonstrates Sree's belief as we can see how Celie came to establish herself as a free woman out of her miserable experiences of the "double jeopardy" of racism and sexism.

As a writer, Alice Walker believes, as Sree observed, that all the wounds can be healed by positioning women in the core of the literary texts as a remedy to the negative effects of race and gender hierarchy. Throughout her work, Walker establishes strong links and affinities between her female characters. Sree thinks that these links are established to "*mountain continuity in confronting and overcoming oppression in their lives, yet Walker is frank in depicting the often devastating circumstances of the "twin afflictions" of racism and sexism*" (16).

In CP Walker depicts the intimate inner lives of women in the midst of their harsh reality. She said in an interview: "*writing to me is not about audience exactly.it's about living. It's about expanding myself as much as I can and seeing myself in as many roles and situations as possible. Let me put it in this way. If I*

could lie as a tree, as a river, as a sun, as a star, as the earth, as a rock, I would. Writing permits me to be more than I am” (16-17). Being a womanist, Walker writes about black women’s struggle in order to make change happen and secure a dignified place. This womanist principle is the basis of Celie’s tale about the transition from struggle to actually making a change. During the process of fighting back, black women absorb all the psychological and physical pain and turn it into a great power that is enough for them to break the shackles of gender and racism which hinder their growth and empowerment : “ *through a series of black women characters she created a saga wherein the feminist-womanist consciousness surfaced*” (17).

Alice Walker traces how these black women characters come to consciousness about their dehumanizing conditions and refuse to surrender to men’s trials to tie them up. Walker’s women grow aware enough not only to refuse to cooperate with men, but also to look for the sources of men’s power which enables them to abuse women. Celie, Sofia, Shug, and Mary Agnes found the source and destroyed it to get their lives back.

The injustices that women face in the American society outraged Walker and led her to take a sharp critical stance of the men in her society, which she expressed thoroughly in her novels. In this context, she said in an interview to Washington Post: “*if I write books that men feel comfortable with, then I have old out*” (Bloom, 2007 6). The critic noted how Walker presented her male characters either as tranquil men who hardly or never speak and whose characters are filtered through the consciousness of her women, or turbulent men who crave love and find themselves unable of creating loving relationships with their wives or children. In *The Color Purple* the peripheral character of Samuel is a tranquil one. He never says a word but he is described through the eyes of Nettie in her letters to Celie. He is never a fully developed character in the novel despite his important role in Nettie’s life as her teacher and later her husband. She describes him as a big black man with “thoughtful and gentle brown eyes. When he says something it settles you, because he never says anything off the top of his head” (CP:128). In comparison to the other black men that Nettie knows he is kind and sensitive. Samuel is clearly the foil of the other men in the novel. He contrasts with them and by doing so he enhances their qualities. Nevertheless, we are never allowed to see the complexities of his thoughts because he is not a full character. The character of Mr.____ , the nameless man in Celie’s life is

probably one of the most outstanding portrayals of a black man who strives to be loved but does not know how.

II. The Narcissistic Model in The Color Purple

Ross believes that the Freudian classic distinction between the self as a love object and the other as an alternative applies to the psychological and social growth of Celie in *The Color Purple*. In 1914 Freud published his essay “*On Narcissism: An Introduction*”. Critics like James Strachey describes this essay as Freud’s most important writing and one of the pivots in the evolution of his views. Abel explains that this essay is very crucial in defining Freud’s instinct classification theory which holds that sexual instincts are among the most powerful human impulses. Freud defines the dynamics of this phenomenon as a simple choice of oneself as asexual object. We can see how Celie unconsciously makes this choice in the first mirror scene in the novel. This unconscious but vital development is explained by Symington:

"In all theoretical models within the psychoanalytic literature, narcissism occurs when the ego takes itself as erotic object or, to put it in classical Freudian terminology, when the libido takes its own self as a love object[...] This suggests that there is an alternative: this may sound obvious, but this alternative is seldom focused on clearly. If there is some other object that the ego can take rather than itself, what is it? Logically, if Narcissus can fall in love with his own reflection, the alternative is that he can fall in love with another."

(Symington: 29-30)

In his essay, Freud discusses two types of narcissism: primary narcissism and secondary narcissism. In both categories the individual’s sexual energy, or, what Freud calls libido, is concentrated on the self rather than an external object, Freud said: “*Primary narcissism refers to the libidinal state of an infant at the beginning of its life; all its libido is directed toward itself*”(Freud 1914 cited by Abel: 35). Secondary narcissism is a possible later development. Shortly after birth, the infant begins to direct its love of the self away from itself and invest it in external objects.

But later on, some individuals withdraw their libido from objects and reinvest it in themselves. This redirection of the libido to the ego constitutes secondary narcissism. Freud presents concisely secondary narcissism: *“The libido which we find attached to objects and which is the expression of an effort to obtain satisfaction in connection with those objects, can also leave the objects and set the subject’s own ego in their place. The name for this way of allocating the libido is narcissism”* (36).

According to Daniel Ross in his essay *Celie in the Looking Glass*, Celie went through primary and secondary narcissism as inevitable stages in her development into a fully self-defined woman. In *The Color Purple* Shug becomes the object of desire for Celie. This is a very important stage of her development, Curk says:

“According to Freud, our love life develops in such a way that one main current desires and longs for other persons as objects of desire, while the other, more ancient current, remains narcissistic in the sense that it does not recognize boundaries between ego and objects and it creates identity of ego and object. It is in this fashion that the ego may enrich itself and take into self aspects or traits of others. In early childhood, this process plays a prominent part in ego formation and consolidation; but it continues in far more complex ways in later developmental stages as well. ” (Curk: 07)

When Celie encounters Shug, she learns to love herself then extends that love to the others. This narcissistic process of coming to love the ego and the object plays an important role in initiating the search for selfhood and wholeness which Celie pursues throughout the novel. Curk discusses this point and says: *“love is a force that not only brings people together, one person loving another, but equally brings oneself together into that one individuality which we become through our identifications”* (07). Curk asserts the Freudian belief that when the differentiation between the ego and the object is established appropriately in a certain stage of our psychological development, and when the ego can finally distinguish his identity from the identity of the external object, we become able to love ourselves and the

others, each different from the other. Therefore object love and self love go hand in hand and develop simultaneously.

III. The Psychoanalytic Model of Growth in The Color Purple:

In his essay *Celie in the Looking Glass*, Daniel Ross discusses in details Celie's psychological and physical growth from a girl to a fully grown woman. He traces her growth according to two crucial stages of psychological development in modern psychoanalysis, namely the mirror stage and the narcissistic stage:

"The subject of the construction of selfhood or ego has a very complicated, uneven history of psychoanalysis. Depending on the theoretical model one adopts, many views are possible [...] in seeking to describe Celie's construction of a self, I am concerned not with establishing the superiority of any school of psychoanalysis but accurately tracing the development of her selfhood as Alice Walker dramatizes it. " (Ross in Bloom, 2008:16)

III.1. The Mirror Stage:

Ross believes that the turning point in CP is Celie's proclamation of her existence and freedom from her husband when she said: *"I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly, and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here"*(CP:122). This declaration is remarkable because she has been subject to an inhuman form of male domination and control. The male control is shown through Celie's fear and inability to speak. So, instead of expressing her emotions and views to another person in the form of natural and basic communication between human beings, Celie writes letters to God. The first few words of the novel reveal Celie's fear of speaking: *"you better not tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy"* (CP:01). Celie's language and use of words exist in the majority of the novel without an audience in much the same way she exists without a definition of herself, identity, or value.

Having the bravery to speak is a major theme in *The Color Purple*. The novel asserts that a hollow self cannot produce speech as shown in the first pages of the novel through the hollowness in Celie's self. *The Color Purple* is a journey of discovery, before discovering speech Celie has to make another basic discovery. It is the discovery of the desire for selfhood, for the others, and for a place in the world

that would support her existence and maintain it. The journey of discovery for Celie starts with the re-appreciation of her stolen and brutally treated body, first by her stepfather and later her own husband Albert. Celie's repossession of her body encouraged her to look for herself and assert that in speech. In the process of discovering her body and repossessing it, she learns how to love herself and the others and to address her letters to another "body", Nettie. Here, she replaced the disembodied God with a real person with whom she can share her stories like normal people do. Ross argues that: "*the crucial scene... in initiating this process is the mirror scene. In this scene Celie first comes to terms with her own body, thus changing her life forever*" (04).

In the mirror scene Celie looks at herself and comes to the realization that she is not as ugly as she thought when Shug, her female friend who encourages her make this discovery, says: "*it a lot prettier than you thought, ain't it?*"(CP: 50). The restoration of women's bodies is a primary project of modern feminism. The patriarchal culture appropriated and exploited women's bodies for centuries. Therefore, women came to hate or even be afraid of their own bodies because of the aggression of men. Adrienne Rich, the American feminist, affirms that women should learn about their bodies and come to terms with them to defeat all the negative feelings and achieve intellectual success: "*but fear and hatred of our bodies had often crippled our brains. Some of the most brilliant women of our time are still trying to think from somewhere outside their female bodies-hence they are still merely reproducing old form of intellection*"(cited by Bloom: 04). Overcoming the negative perception of the female body can be a difficult and painful experience for some women. For example, in modern poetry female poets have a tendency to use their bodies as a source of imagery. However, their male counterparts seem to be far removed from the body struggle. Their images often portray strangulation, cutting and mutilation in their efforts to describe psychic trauma in body-related terms. This is what Alicia Ostriker labeled as "somatic terms". As a result, the woman's body becomes a fragment or a torn surface rather than a continuity of the woman's self, a picture evident in Celie's hesitation to look at her body.

Facing the body is not facing the abuse of one individual but a whole history of enslavement. The woman's body then becomes a reminder for women of their inferior status. Celie in *The Color Purple* suffered from repeated rapes and assaults

which made her come up with an innovative strategy for survival and self defense against the abuse of her husband: *“he beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the bell. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear men”*(CP:18). Celie’s neglect of her body, however, is not as striking as her ignorance of it. To describe her hysterectomy she says: *“a girl at church say you git big if you bleed every month, I don’t bleed no more”*(CP: 08). Even this piece of information which is very personal and critical seems secondary to Celie. Celie’s state of utter ignorance of her body and unwillingness to learn about it changes with the arrival of her husband’s mistress Shug Avery. While Celie practices her traditional role as a nurse for Shug they become close, and Celie develops a new sense of the female body combined with a spiritual awakening: *“I wash her body, it feel like I’m praying”*(CP: 32). Shug’s friendship allows Celie a discovery of her body, sexual pleasure, an ability to speak and share, an emancipation from masculine degradation. Shug encourages Celie to look at private parts of her body. At first, Celie looks at herself with revulsion but when Shug tells her what she thinks of herself she says: *“it mine”* (CP: 50). This response suggests Celie’s awakening from her previous ignorance and fear of her body. The word “mine” abnegates male control and restores Celie’s body to its original owner. Hence, Celie’s acceptance of her body represents the beginning of a long quest for selfhood and knowledge of one’s being. Next, she discovers her identity through her friendships with other women: Shug, Nettie, Sofia and Marry Agnes *“with her newfound identity, Celie is able to break free from the masculine prohibition against speech and to join a community of women, thus freeing herself from dependence on and subjection to male brutality”*(Ross in Bloom, 2008:06).

Lacan as well as Couger affirms that the mirror offers only an illusion of wholeness while the self is always divided. However, Walker offers in more optimistic view in CP, contrary to the negative view of the inevitability of unattainableness that Lacan explained. CP agrees with another view which prevails in modern thought. This modern concept asserts that illusions of wholeness are not negative but represent positive accommodations that help in the formation of meaning in one’s existence, in much the same way Celie reconciles with herself and her body through the illusion of wholeness generated by the discovery of her body through the

mirror. Eagleton notes that everyone lacks centering but we tend to interpret ourselves differently to assume a significance to our existence. Eagleton believes that the relationship between a person and the society is the same as the relationship between the child and its image in the mirror as Lacan claimed. The critic says that: ***“in both cases the human subject is supplied with a satisfying unified image of selfhood by identifying with an object which reflects this image back to it in a closed narcissistic circle. In both cases, too, this image involves a misrecognition, since it idealizes the subject’s real situation”*** (cited by Bloom, 2008: 07).

According to Eagleton, this misrecognition or *meconnaissance*, as Lacan called it, triggers selfhood because the foremost desire of the human being is recognition. The individual becomes a subject by subjecting himself to a misrecognition. The desire of recognition is closely linked to the desire to be desired or to be a unified existence. This desire urges the individual to look at others for validation. The mirror unleashes Celie’s imagination and allows her to think of all the possibilities for herself. The reason for that, says Juliet Mitchell, is a construction of imagination. Psychoanalysis suggests that the individual who does not experience a normal passage through the mirror: ***“ can be arrested, trapped in a very early stage of development. This abnormal passage may result in an autistic individual. In The Color Purple Celie suffers from a severe shortage in her sense of identity in the first pages of the novel. Celie, prior to her experience with Shug, was left without a sense of herself or externality or otherness”*** (08). Ross considers the absence of a sense of the other very dangerous in the development of selfhood and says: ***“this lack of an other is extremely critical, for Lacan links the discovery of the other to our becoming social beings; without it we become over attached to early fixations of identity, unable to adapt them as necessary to life’s demands”*** (08). Celie’s inability to address an audience is a sign of her autism which is essentially a result of an arrested development due to the lack of an "other". Earlier in the novel, Sofia attempts to draw Celie out of her silence but she fails because Celie, at that stage, has not yet encountered the concept of the other. Celie does not only need an audience, someone to speak to, but also someone to show her how to act and what to say. Celie finds that with the assistance of her friendship with Shug which is called by Sharon Hymes *“narcissistic friendship”*. This friendship served as an initiation of a life style that Celie embraces as an ideal ego seen in Shug’s character. Shug saved Celie from

autism by introducing her to otherness and by giving her an audience and someone to love.

According to Lacan, the two main signs which mark the end of the mirror stage are the ability to use coherent language and the growth of aggressiveness, says Ross. The use of coherent language by Celie was primarily guided by Shug. Elizabeth Fifer says: *“each piece of Shug’s advice changes Celie’s language and becomes part of Celie’s progress”* (cited by Ross in Bloom,2008:12). Celie’s aggressiveness grows clearly when she discovers that Nettie’s letters have been hidden from her. Celie begins to contemplate murdering Albert with a razor: *“All day long I act just like Sofia. I stutter. I mutter to myself. I stumble around the house crazy for Mr. blood. In my mind, he falling dead every which a way. By time night come, I can’ speak. Every time I open my mouth nothing come out but a little burp”* (CP: 74). In this passage it is clear how Celie’s newfound ability of speech has been overwhelmed by her desire for murder and revenge. Ross thinks that Celie controls her aggressiveness using two means of sublimation: the use of speech and replacing the razor with another less harmful sharp instrument, the needle.

By using language Celie replaces aggressive intentions of cutting and killing because she needs none of that when she finally builds up the courage to declare her independence from a shocked Albert who watches her in disbelief saying: *“ you, a lowdown dog is what’s wrong, I say. It’s time to leave you and enter into the creation. And you dead body just the welcome mat I need [...] You took my sister Nettie away from me, I say. And she was the only person love me in the world”* (CP:122). Ross argues that Celie made the active choice of using language and her voice to break free because she learnt from Sofia’s experience that only a defeated woman stops violence with violence. Celie’s power of speech overpowers her and seems almost like a supernatural energy: *“Look like when I open my mouth the air rush in and shape words”* (CP: 122). Thus, Celie’s weapon to break the shackles of Albert was not a sharp razor, but the words of fire that traumatized him and sank him into depression. Ross says: *“She further recognizes the power of speech when her curse on Albert sinks him into a life-threatening depression [...] Albert’s regeneration begins only when he does what Celie has demanded- return Nettie’s letters to her”* (Ross in Bloom,2008:13). Celie also sees how speech can break male control in the example of another woman she knows: Mary Agnes. Ross notes that the

binding of women is very important and the sacrifices they make as a collectivity are very effective in order to undo male domination. Mary Agnes who once has been beaten by Sofia because of a love triangle with Harpo, submits to rape by the warden of the prison where Sofia was arrested in order to free her. Ross adds that: ***“this act of submission gives Mary Agnes a power of guilt over the warden”*** (13). It is very ironic how Mary comes home in a very bad shape, but with a new power over men: ***“Poor little Squeak come home with a limp. Her dress rip. Her hat missing and one of the hills come off her shoe [...] He saw the Hodges in me, she say, and he didn’t like it one bit”*** (CP: 59-60).

Moreover, Mary denounces, with her new sense of self confidence and power, the derogatory name “Squeak” which has been imposed on her, and reclaimed her real beautiful name “Mary”: ***“Harpo say, I love you, Squeak. He kneel down and try to put his arms around her waist. She stand up. My name Mary Agnes, she say”*** (CP: 61). Mary’s emancipation, Ross says, goes beyond reclaiming her real name but she also starts to sing though: ***“she got the kind of voice you never think of trying to sing a song. It little, it high, it sort of meowing. But Mary Agnes don’t care”*** (CP:61). Mary tries to imitate Shug’s success so she sings, travels, and chooses when to check in and out of Harpo’s life. Mary finally took control and freed herself from the oppression of men. Ross argues that Mary’s story foreshadows Celie’s future: ***“Thus, her story foreshadows the story of Celie’s freedom, both validating the theme that strength can come from enduring oppression with as much dignity as possible and then rising to denounce it. Ultimately, the victim gains moral power over the oppressor”*** (Ross in Bloom, 2008:13).

Moral power is prevailing theme in CP. Walker explores this theme to show its importance in empowering the weak. In his book *“Racism and the Law: The Legacy and Lessons of Plessy”* Gerald J. Postema postulates that:

“Moral power [...] is the power of the weaker party in a relationship of domination to impose costs on the stronger party’s oppressive actions, costs that are significant enough to force the stronger to take seriously the moral claims of the weaker. The exercise of moral power differs from the exercise of

economic power or physical violence not so much in the means it uses as in its aims and intentions. The aim of the exercise of moral power is not just to wring concessions from the stronger, but to bring him to his moral senses, to move him to pay attention to the evidence already available to him that the weaker party has rights which he is violating". (Gerald, 1997:16)

The aggressiveness of Celie is further cushioned by developing a form of art which is sewing. Freud stressed in his psychoanalytic work that art is an efficient sublimation of aggressiveness. Celie chooses the traditionally exclusive women's art of sewing to remain separated from the world of violence and abuse created by men. Ross argues that by sewing pants for men and women Celie narrows down the gap between the sexes. Although she initially refuses the idea of wearing pants because she is not a man, Sug convinces her that pants are not only for men and that they are also useful for women: *"Why not? Say Shug. You do all the work around here. It's a scandal, the way you look out there plowing in a dress. How you keep from falling over it or getting the plow caught in it is beyond me"* (CP: 86). In addition, Celie's sewing brings her to the primordial power of women. Adrienne Rich discusses women's use of weaving and sewing as means of transformative power: *"the conversion of raw fibers into thread was connected with the power over life and death; the spider who spins thread out of her own body"* (cited by Ross in Bloom, 2008:14). However, for Celie in CP sewing was not a way of concealing her shame. It associates her with a number of female characters in American literature who do not try to hide their shame but displace it and glue it on the ones who should be ashamed, the oppressors. Ross says:

"The most prominent member of this set is Hawthorne's Hester Prynne. Forced by patriarchs of Salem to wear the scarlet letter as an emblem of shame, Hester uses her art to create a letter that represents, to the narrator who discovers it two centuries later, a "mystic symbol", giving evidence of a "now forgotten art". Inspired by this symbol

Hawthorne creates a story in which the bearers of shame are the puritan patriarchs who try to dehumanize and defeminize Hester for her refusal to submit to their code." (Ross in bloom,2008:14).

The art of Celie affected her in much the same way, although the effect in her case was immediate. Instead of accepting shame and living with it, she places it on Albert who begins a process of self-regeneration. Albert changes at the end and becomes a new man who shows his respect by participating with Celie in doing her traditionally feminine task of sewing. After changing his view that men are supposed to wear the pants, Albert learns how to love and share, and joins Celie to sew together in an act that undid the male domination and replaced in with a new spirit: "***Now us sit sewing and talking and smoking our pipes***" (CP:163).

Towards the end of the novel Celie faces the mirror again, full length unlike the limited look at the beginning of the novel. In this scene Celie shows no hesitation or fear of looking at her reflection. Her courage is a sign of psychic growth and a proof that she is healed from the trauma of rape and mutilation. This newfound self confidence does not only help her to carry on her journey of self-discovery, but also protects her from regressing again. Blos defines regression as: "***a formative feature among adolescents as they disengage from early object ties***" (Kroger: 56).

Modern psychoanalytic studies confirm that adolescents face challenges that must be overcome in order to form their identities and characters. According to Kroger, Blos divided these challenges into categories:

- reworking and mastering childhood trauma
- ego continuity
- sexual identity

We can see that Celie has successfully gone through these passages to form her selfhood. In the second mirror scene Celie seems to have reworked and mastered her childhood trauma and accepted herself as she is with an evident maturity. We can also see her ego continuity in the way her physical growth accompanied her psychological growth to form a continuity of her self and bond her interior and

exterior together in a unity which seems like her only way out of the repression she wants to escape. When she looks at herself in the final mirror scene she says: “*my skin dark. My nose just a nose. My lips just lips. My body just a woman’s body going through the changes of age. Nothing special here for anybody to love*” (CP153). After a nineteen year love relationship with Shug, Celie finally gains her sexual identity and accepts her body and her coming of age gracefully. Ross believes that Celie’s comments on her own body signify that she broke free from Shug and that she established her independence and identity at last. Here, we can see how the years of abuse and oppression affected Celie’s life. In a time when she is expected to be a woman who has long been mature and independent, she has just made that step.

III.2. Narcissistic Friendship and The m(other):

Celie loved Shug, not only because she saw someone she wants to become in her, but most importantly because Shug simply listened. In the beginning of the novel, Celie was fourteen and without friends. The teenage girl regresses, in many instances, in her adolescence and returns to imaginary fusions with her mother. Friendship, in this case, is often a good way to stop this regression. Celie, in the absence of a friend, remains trapped in infantile fantasies in much of her teenage years. The abuse of men is another important contributor in shaping Celie’s image of herself. Celie defines herself in what Lacan described in his research as fragmented images of castration, mutilation, and dismemberment. Castration can be seen in her early hysterectomy. Mutilation is clearly detected in Celie’s fear of scissors “*every time I saw him coming with the scissors and a comb and the stool, I start to cry*” (CP:69). She feels forced to replace her mother in order to satisfy her stepfather therefore she is stripped from her will and innocence. When her stepfather raped her Celie’s mind and imagination were filled with violent and bloody images like the image of the bursting open of her body when she delivered her first baby. Celie’s imagined bursting of the body and her description of her baby delivery illustrate the fragmented images of dismemberment that Celie has in her imagination. The fragmentation of Celie’s self perception is evident in her stepfather’s consideration of Celie as less than a whole woman when he introduced her to her future husband “*She ugly - He say. But she ain’t no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want and she ain’t gonna make you feed it or clothe it*” (CP: 09). In order to initiate a desire for selfhood, Celie needs

to redefine her body as a whole not as a fragment or a remnant of a rape. However, this redefinition and reevaluation of herself is not enough because she needs a model to set a vivid example for her. This example is personified in Shug Avery who represents the strong woman that Celie needs to follow her lead. So, Shug becomes the ideal self or the ego ideal that Freud described in *“On Narcissism”* as “exalted” in the mind of the subject. Shug is the model that Celie tries to conform to **“Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty than my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier than me. I see her there in fears. Her face rouge. Her hair like something tail”** (CP:09). In this passage Celie makes two important comparisons which are very revealing. First, she compares Shug to her mother and describes her as more beautiful than her mother who she describes beautiful as well. Celie with the introduction of Shug, Celie replaces her infantile idealization of her mom with another model of beauty. The second remarkable comparison is Celie’s comparison of shug with herself. Here, Celie starts to assess herself as a way of constructing a selfhood by means of comparison with another woman which allows Celie to build an image of herself that will later on in the novel replace the castrated fragment of an abused child to a mature and strong woman.

Celie nurses Shug when she falls sick and during this process she makes connections between Shug and her two children who were taken from her by her stepfather. Celie compares nursing Shug to yet another infantile image which is the image of playing with a doll **“ I work on her like she a doll”** (CP:34). In the psychoanalytic school of object relations the doll **“represents a transitional device that helps Celie come to grips with the complicated feelings of separation and ambivalence that characterize her thoughts of both Olivia and her mother. Celie in other words has began to employ some typical mechanisms of psychic growth and development”**(Ross in Bloom, 2008:10). After Shug’s recovery the tow friends exchange roles and Shug becomes Celie’s nurse. Celie’s illness is not somatic but psychological because she struggles to find an identity. Shug awakens Celie’s quest for selfhood when she sings a song that she wrote especially for Celie and named it after her: **“first time somebody made something and name it after me”** (CP: 47). The simple act of naming something after her assumes the existence and value of Celie to herself. This act confirmed to Celie that she must be somebody, a whole person, a woman. This act also represents Celie’s first clue that language is not necessarily

produced under the control of men and that women can express their affection and feelings using language.

Shug's mother role and Celie's love to her show Celie's development through the primary stages of narcissism and ego formation "***in which two love objects exist, the self and the mother***" (Freud cited by Ross in Bloom, 2008: 10). Furthermore, Celie moves to secondary narcissism. Ragland Sullivan said that secondary narcissism is the stage in which self love is displaced onto another. Celie's love is displaced from loving herself to loving another person or an "other" represented by Shug. Sullivan believes that the relationship between mother and child is crucial for the child's self identification or "***fusion with the mother thus establishing boundaries necessary to the child's individuation***" (Sullivan cited by Ross in Bloom, 2008: 11). Ross believes that the process cited above was absent in Celie's life, leaving her with the huge gap in her personality. Shug Avery was the substitute of the mother figure and was the one to compensate the lack of a mother-daughter connection for Celie. Therefore, Shug does not only play the role of Celie's narcissistic friend but, more importantly the mother surrogate, or in Lacan's work m (other). Ragland Sullivan elaborates more on Lacan's m (other) notion: "***a subject first becomes aware of itself by identification with a person (object), usually the mother, although the figure maybe any constant nurturer***" (Sullivan cited by Ross in Bloom, 2008: 11). Ross assumes that Celie suffered from a deep oedipal struggle from which Shug Avery helped Celie recover. This struggle can be noted in Nettie's narrative of their life before she left. This part of the novel reveals that Celie's father was hanged when she was only two years old and that her mother's health deteriorated after that. Celie's stepfather married her mother when she was four years old, the time when the Oedipal stage begins. Her mother was so sick and could not satisfy her husband who turned his lust on young Celie. In fact Celie believes that her stepfather is her real "pa", so her early life was a "***pervert rewriting of the oedipal script with Celie aware of her mother's ambivalence about yielding her wifely role to her daughter***" (Ross in Bloom, 2008: 11). Ross's assumption is illustrated in the following line from *The Color purple*: "***My mama she fuss at me an look at me. She happy cause he good to her now***" (CP: 7). Thus, Celie's desire to annihilate herself early on in the novel is not surprising given her constant sense of guilt for being a

sexual surrogate of her mother. But Shug Avery's intervention in addition to Nettie's revelation that "pa is not our pa" (CP: 102) allowed Celie to reassess her selfhood.

Ross argues that Shug's role as m(other) gives Celie an additional form of identification for a woman. Freud put forward a very controversial suggestion which states that: "*women tend to develop inferior object choices to men's. where men transfer their narcissism to another, women tend to rechannel love back into the self*" (Ross in Bloom, 2008:12). In his groundbreaking book "On Narcissism", Freud asserted that "*such women love themselves more than anyone else, and they seek not to love but to be loved*" (12).

Celie's superior object choice is "anaclytic" which means that Celie grounds herself in her relationship with Shug who represents a mother image. Laplanche says that: "*even if one anaclytic object choice is alleged to be more characteristic of and to the other or narcissistic object choice of women, there are in fact two possibilities open to every human being*" (12). The choice of Celie, according to Ross, tends to be masculine according to the anaclytic model. However, this choice is one of many other decisions she makes to alter her status from passive submission to active decision making. The power of making decisions helped develop Celie's sense of her identity leading eventually to a confidence in using speech to face male domination.

IV. Epistolarity in The Color Purple: The Letter as a Means of Self-Discovery

IV.1. The Epistolary Form of the Novel:

The epistolary form of the novel peaked in eighteenth-century Europe and produced classics such as: Montesquieu's *Letters Persanes*, Richardson's *Pamela and Clarissa*, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, Goethe's *Werther* and Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. The letter has been used as an artistic vehicle by many artists of various backgrounds and periods. Nevertheless, the epistolary form of the novel has been regarded as historically restricted and archaic for decades, and a describable in terms of its rise and fall according to Altman. The critic notes that in the seventies several creative writers revived epistolarity as an artistic form including *The Fan* (1977) by Bob Randall. Altman maintains that: "*the epistolary novel is a hardy species that continues to produce lively strains in various parts of the world*" (Altman, 1982:03). He argues that the epistolary novel varies in content and style despite the striking similarities between epistolary works of varying periods and writers and which are hard to ignore, she explains that:

"They reveal a surprising number of similar literary structures and intriguingly persistent patterns when read together with other examples of the epistolary genre. These structures, recurring thematic relations, character types, narrative events, and organization can in turn be related to properties inherent to the letter itself. In numerous instances the basic formal and functional characteristics of the letter, far from being merely ornamental, significantly influence the way meaning is consciously and unconsciously constructed by writers and readers of epistolary works. "

(03-04)

Altman goes on to assert that meaning in the epistolary novel is made in a variety of strategies. Meaning can be produced directly by the epistolary form or more complexly by the multitude of techniques and vehicles used by the artist. Altman maintains that the letter has an intermediary nature. It is a connection between two distant and separated points, as a bridge between sender and receiver, the writer of the epistolary form has the freedom to choose to emphasize either the distance separating the points or the bridge connecting them. Many of Ovid's *Heroides* are letters of fiction in which abandoned heroines bemoan the distances that keep them far from their loved ones. The people who write to each other use the letter as mediator which takes a halfway point position as an “*either-or*”, “*neither-nor*” phenomenon (Altman,1982: 42-43). As a means of communication, the letter straddles the emptiness or hole between the sender and the receiver and between the presence and the absence; the two persons are neither together nor apart, as Altman puts it : “*the letter lies halfway between the possibility of total communication and the risk of no communication at all*” (43).

IV.2. Celie's Motivation for Writing:

At the opening of the novel a frightened Celie is given a strong reason to write instead of talk about her feelings when Mr.____ threatened: “*You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mommy*” (CP: 01). She is concerned about her mother and therefore obeys Mr.____. We also learn another reason for Celie's choice of writing as a means of articulation through one of Nettie's letters: “*I remember one time you said your life made feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read your letters or no, I know you will go on writing them*” (CP: 78). Celie is so ashamed and feels guilty for the incest she commits with her stepfather whom she thought was her real father. She is warned not to tell anybody, so she needs a substitute, another way to exteriorize her feelings and articulate her torment. The articulation of her feelings is very crucial for her to survive and to cope with her terrible situation. Therefore, at the age of fourteen, when her real misery begins, she starts writing letters to God in order to tell him about her pain. In addition, Celie loses her mother and later on her sister Nettie, who is taken away from her to the far lands of Africa, and writing becomes even more vital for her to compensate for the lost love of her mother and much beloved sister as Schwartz

suggests. As for the effect of writing on Celie, it is enormous. The whole process of development and evolution from one state to another is due to her act of writing. In the beginning of her writing, Celie transforms what happens to her and to the others surrounding her into letters with detailed personalized depictions. This simple but much needed act helps her adjust her situation and process and filter what happens around her even if she has no power of changing the terrible things she witnesses: ***“But I don’t never git used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook. My mama she fuss at me and look at me. She happy cause he good to her now. But too sick to last long”*** (CP:01).

As Celie’s experiences become more intense and significant, her writing moves from mere reporting of events to psychological analysis and even humor as Schwartz argues. The change in her writing is a reflection of the development of her character from a passive reporter to an active analyst who is aware and able to see behind the happenings of her life. By becoming a skillful writer, writing is rendered a strong weapon used to achieve liberation rather than just a space for Celie to breath freely. Writing has also led her to autonomy. In the beginning of the novel, she is a naïve abused, dependent and frightened young girl, who obeys and cannot make an independent decision; but as the novel progresses, thanks to writing and the relationship she develops with Shug, she becomes a strong independent self-governing woman who can refuse and say no. When Mr.____ asks Celie to marry him by the end of the novel she makes no second thoughts to say no: ***“ ... Mr.____ done ast me to marry him again, this time in the spirit as well as in the flesh, and just after I say Naw, I still don’t like frogs”*** (CP:170).

Schwartz predicts an alternative scenario of Celie’s life if she did not develop the skill of writing and affirms that it was an important vehicle of her eventual liberation:

“On this journey her written voice has been the vehicle for self expression and self revelation. Without the act of writing, Celie might have developed a distractive rage against her mistreatment. Or she would have been silent and invisible and probably would have died early, like

her mother. The act of writing has saved her from this fate, as it has been a productive process and not a distractive one."

(Schwartz, 1998:06).

IV.3. The Letter as a Literary Vehicle of Self Expression in The Color Purple:

The Color Purple is one of the novels which use distinctive form where the protagonist Celie keeps diaries of her life and the lives of people around her in the form of letters. Tucker confirms that the epistolary form is a convention that is mostly used by women and only rarely by men. He also maintains that it is a semi-private genre, which was first used by women due to their modest educational levels and because they were not expected to be published and read publicly. Men on the other hand were classically educated and preferred a more academic style which obeyed the classical patterns of writing. Contrary to the classical style, the letters were more casual and contained descriptions of the domestic life and were formless and artless. In the case of Celie in *The Color Purple*, she finds herself forced to adjust her letter writing to the events around her. Most of the events in Celie's life are male-dominated where men do most of the talking and acting. Therefore, rendering male speech and acts into words and actions as she sees them is quite a challenging task. For example, we can see how Celie finds herself very precautious when telling the event of her rape after Alphonse's accusation that she is just telling lies. In the beginning Celie writes letters to God. Schwartz states that this may be considered as a bridge between Celie and her inner self or the part of her which at last finds the weapon that can be used effectively to fight back. She adds that writing to God is also writing to a part of herself that keeps growing until finally finding the God she believes in and that Shug teaches her about. After finding out about the letters of Nettie which were hidden from her, Celie's letters are redirected towards a human or a direct human addressee, her sister Nettie who is thousands of miles away from her.

The letters in CP represent windows through which the reader learns about the life of Celie and the other characters. According to Schwartz, Celie plays a double role in the letters. She is the author (narrative present) and a character who plays a role in the events she tells (narrative past). The letters are a vehicle of self expression which allows the reader a maximum of knowledge about the characters sensibilities

and feelings. However, in CP we not only find the letters of Celie, but also those of Nettie whose voice alternates with her sister: “ *the letters reinvent events that happened by shuffling their chronological order and juxtaposing different conversations that seem to have happened simultaneously*” (Schwartz, 1998:07). Nettie and Celie’s letters are so intimate and as observers we should relate them to each other. Celie is the primary witness and narrator of a multitude of events and characters that Nettie learns about through Celie’s letters becoming a secondary witness.

Through the dialect of Celie in her letters we are informed about her astonished and impressive consciousness as she develops a greater conception of herself with time. Alice Walker achieves a considerable effect on her audience by exploring two narrative voices: the educated and conventional diction of Nettie and the pastoral dialect of Celie through which we come to understand more about her plight in a larger and more complex cultural background as Rainwater and Scheick believe. Celie demonstrates a great audacity considering Alphonse’s threat, her husband’s mistreatment and her social disconnection: “*don’t nobody come see us*” (CP:04).

Celie uses writing to raise her consciousness by talking about the experiences of other women and juxtaposing them on herself. She finds the freedom to judge, examine and analyze what goes on around her allowing the reader a deeper knowledge of her psyche, thoughts and philosophy, Fifer says that: “*All her triumphs are made available and possible by the writing itself*” (Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick:156). Fifer agrees with Schwartz in the latter’s prediction of how Celie’s life would end up if she did not express herself through writing: “*Celie participates in the creation of meaning for herself through language. Without language, silence would have ensured madness or, as in her mother’s case, an early death*” (Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick:156). Fifer maintains that the development of Celie is not solely due to her external experiences but precisely to her writing which allows the processing of those experiences and transforms them. Alice walker makes the sisters’ coming to a feminist consciousness gradual in the mosaic formed by both plots. The design of Walker presents Nettie and Celie feminist thinking as if they were from the seventies. The feminism demonstrated by these two characters parallels that which existed in the decade before the publication of CP. This seemingly confusing

presentation of her female characters, Fifer thinks, risks anachronism. Fifer believes that the letter form saved the novel from becoming a melodrama. The letters tell about the problems that the characters face and their solutions which seem as faits accomplis where the narrator expresses a delayed joy or excitement. Walker prefers to keep some pieces of the drama missing so as to leave it to the reader to imagine and construct the events left in the blanks. For instance, when Sofia is reunited with Harpo we read so little about what happens when they first meet after their ordeal or what they said to each other. Therefore, the reader must participate in imagining the past events that lead to the present solution. Fifer calls the letters a vast soliloquy or endless after dinner story in which the lives of all the characters and events are interconnected through the alternation of the narrations of Celie and Nettie. She describes the letters as a mosaic of colors and shapes which guide the reader in the girls' journeys to becoming women. The reader witnesses Celie and Nettie growing and reshaping themselves which help him feel and understand the grief and suffering that lasts thirty years, Fifer says that:

"The poignancy of celie's grief lies in her need for her sister and her inability to reach her or the children born in terror by her stepfather. Celie's recounting of her life, her controlling and shaping it, replaces sister love and mother love; paradoxically, their flight saves Nettie, Adam, and Olivia, just as Celie's struggle to communicate her feeling in their absence saves her and gives her autonomy."

(157).

In "*Meridian*", Walker's previous novel, she writes about tormented and unwanted women, deprived mothers, and unsuccessful relationships. Celie's expression in CP that: "*You (God) must be sleep*"(CP1:02), is just an echo of Meridian mother's helpless cry that it is not fair. The protagonists of both novels are not traditional rebels; they try to come up with a new type of discourse adequate to the complexity and fogginess of their surroundings. Meridian expresses herself in social action and poetry, and Celie manifests her feelings through sewing and writing.

Despite the differing personalized modes of self-expression, both Celie and Meridian are storytellers trapped between horror and humor. *The Color Purple* and *Meridian* are predictable in their design of storyline with birth, marriage, separation, and reunion. However, Walker is more careful in sustaining the structure of CP compared to the experimental juxtaposition used to support the narrative of *Meridian*.

The letters of CP seem like shattered pieces of mystery filled with ambiguity. They do not offer closure to stop the confusion. Both Celie and Nettie are unable to tell everything or say with certainty if they know or understand the changes they undergo: *“I just say yeah, like I know it”* (CP: 11). Despite the ambiguity and confusion surrounding the letters and their intertwining spaces, the therapeutic effect on their writers are clear and undeniable. Celie acts actively in the events she recounts in her letters, and the act of writing gives her plenty of space to reconsider and contemplate their meaning: *“Her letters are an elaborate literary mask, subjective, emotional, affording Celie all the advantageous intimacy of first person narration and Walker all the distance and control of omniscient narration”* (157).

It is ironic enough that the exchange between these eloquent letters, Fifer says, does not happen immediately. A set is written but not sent, and another is sent but not read by the desired addressee. She adds that this “airtight” quality is maintained with a number of effects which are inserted in the letters. These letters are brief, intriguing, and overlapping pieces of writing written by two eccentric characters with direct narration, internal dialogue, monologue, drama, melodrama, painful questions without answers, dreams, humor, vignettes, conversations, scenarios with recurrent themes, confessions, forgiveness, rage, problems and their unfolding, and philosophic digression. Fifer maintains that Walker’s marvelous expression of these elements is indeed a masterful achievement.

Fifer says that the letters are characterized by a cyclical unfolding of events involving lives or seasons. Each letter contains a scenario which may be fully constructed in the succession of letters. Walker’s design of her plot using letters fueled the story with energy and ensured surprise, irony and pleasure. Thus, the letters become a mechanism with its own local effects and twists. In addition to the chronological order of the letters which affects the readers’ reactions considerably,

Celie's dialect represents another mask covering the face of the author and bewildering the audience.

Fifer maintains that by controlling the readers' understanding of the character, Walker easily assumes the position of medium. Celie's writing is her only rebellion against Alphonse's threats and prohibitions. By the use of the only form of language she learnt but rarely used, she discovers all the possibilities allowed to her through her dialect. Celie learns how to exploit this powerful tool in developing her self-awareness through self-expression. When she is told by Darlene that she could be a better person if she polished her speech, she says: "***What I care, I ast. I'm happy***" (CP: 127). Her response demonstrates self-confidence and defiance of the social codes she lived by for a long time. It also shows a great maturity in accepting herself as she is without any willingness to change anything to look or sound better for the others as long as she looks and sounds right for herself. To her this is true happiness.

Fifer describes the languages used by Celie and Nettie as: "***each honed fine within its oddly formal conventions, they are both stylized and fluid***" (158). The letters of the sisters are personal and intimate, but Celie's dialect adds a new sense of community and simplicity in expressing sensitive topics. The dialect of Celie, simple and pastoral as it is, is an attracting and disarming factor, says Fifer, establishing a strong and inevitable affinity between the reader and Celie. Nettie has been educated and learned the formal diction of letters, when Celie finally reads them after years of mischievous separation; the language of Nettie becomes the one which needs translation to the reader, not Celie's. Therefore, Celie was not only happy and excited about finding her sister's letters, but also amazed by the new language that the educated Nettie used. She expresses her mixed feelings when she says: "***What with being shock, crying and blowing my nose, and trying to puzzle out words us don't know, it took a long time to read just the first two or three lines***" (CP:84). Fifer believes that Celie's use of simple pastoral dialect of the South and her unshaken pride of it, is probably due to her closed society where pastoral dialect is the only known and used language. However, when Nettie finally returns, Celie starts to accept what she initially considered as a strange and alien language and allows the linguistic gap to be bridged: "***Speak a little funny, but us giting use to it***" (CP:173).

The subjects of Celie's letters change remarkably when her audience changes, according to Fifer. She notes that when Celie writes her letters to God, she speaks about her bewilderment at her situation and family matters. But her discourse takes a much more emotively personal tone she starts writing to another human being, her sister Nettie. Fifer then enumerates the effects of Celie's addressing another person. First, Celie responds to the letters of Nettie and begins a process of change due to the new ideas and horizons that she sees in her sister's writings. Second, she finally rids herself of the guilt of incest which tortured her conscience for a long time when Nettie uncovers the truth that her "pa" is not her real father. Third, Fifer concludes, Celie is allowed easier access to Walker's strategy of storytelling when she starts addressing another human being.

Celie's realization of language differences and their significances is also a realization of reality and her selfhood. The letters give her a look at what Nettie faced during her journey in Africa. Simultaneously, she learns a great deal about herself and how people see her and even what will become of her: *"Through the language of letters, she goes beyond the arbitrarily set limits of her culture[...] Without the letters, Celie's physical, psychological, social and economic status would have made her both invisible and silent"* (Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick: 159). After Celie endures indifference and abuse from her husband Albert, she builds up the courage to call him: *"lowdown dog"* (CP: 116). Her union with her supporting and loving sister through the letters fuels her with the audacity she needs to face Albert and express the rage she feels towards him. Language gives Celie power and establishes within her a confidence in her existence allowing her to announce her presence with pride: *"I'm pore, I'm black [...] but I'm here"* (CP: 122). Fifer assumes that language gives Celie the chance to change herself and the lives of people around her: *"And Celie has other valuable attributes to compensate for her poverty of opportunity- curiosity, faith, and most importantly, the power to enter and change the lives around her. She herself becomes as flexible, open, and continually involving as the language she uses"* (Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick: 159).

The critic asserts that by making Celie a reservoir for the stories of the other people, Alice Walker highlights the social context of the novel. The wise and innocent Celie develops by telling what she knows about the world as it is. For instance, she reports the horrifying beating of Sofia: *"Scare me so bad I near bout*

drop my grip. But I don't, I put it on the floor of the cell" (CP: 56), and smokes evil out of Alphonse's house when after she inherits it: *"Us started at the very top of the house in the attic, and us smoked it all the way down to the basement, chasing out all the evil and making a place for good"* (CP: 146). The cultural context where Celie lives is hard to deal with. However Celie's writing and self-expression elevated her to the level of acquiring wisdom and surviving her ordeal. Fifer says:

Her culture, intractable to some, bears little initial resemblance to the world outside in its wisdom, morality and opportunity. But the forces that shape Celie's world, reflected in the complaints we hear[...] and the pathos and hopelessness of her situation, are slowly transcended by the understanding and the distance that self-expression requires.

(Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick: 160).

Similar to her own stories, Celie becomes more powerful and defined as she moves from the simple reporting of dramatic scenes with long dialogues, to psychological deciphering, and finally humour. Fifer believes that dialect provides its own world view, its own answers, and its own determination. It does not reduce, it compresses, it does not simplify, it focuses, it achieves distinction without cliché.

Fifer thinks that the use of dialect further emphasizes the character's context as narrator. Celie and Nettie's connection was not immediate because of Nettie's diction and the separation which made understanding quite challenging. Even when they finally meet after thirty years, they stumble to walk towards each other. The result of decades of separation is further confusion and disorientation: *"Us totter toward one another like us use to do when us was babies. Then us feel so weak when us touch. Us knock each other down. But what us care? Us sit and lay there on the porch inside each other's arms"* (CP: 172). This childish tone in Celie's dialect is another attraction in the novel. The dialect that Walker used with the character of Celie has the ability to convey primitive and childish-like effects. The reader witnesses the development of the sensibility of a child approximating adult discourse. For instance, Celie says teefs instead of teeth and booboo instead of crying.

Nevertheless, her childish dialect approximates brilliantly the crisis in her world. Celie's use of language, Fifer assumes, saved her from the destructiveness of the rage that is justified and understandable. She adds that the simple dialect of Celie makes the dangerous sound less severe or threatening.

Fifer notes that Celie's rebellion is also seen in her open love to Shug, the free spirited and socially rejected woman. When Shug falls ill everyone in her community including Albert, her lover and Celie's husband, leave her side except Celie who truly loves her. By doing so, she too rejects the norms of the society and defies its limitations. Celie's invitation to Shug into her own home considering her past with Albert opposes the social codes, Celie's father-in-law says: "***Not many women let they husband whore lay up in the house***" (CP: 35). Celie learnt how to bring language to her advantage: "***The closest us ever felt***" (CP: 35). Fifer comments that: "Here Albert joins the world of women in the rejection of his father's rules. His alliance with Celie to heal Shug prefigures his later maturation when "he gets religious" and tries to win Celie back" (Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick: 161).

Celie saves Shug's life by nursing her when she was too sick, and gets saved in return. Celie reports her admiration of Shug's resolute language. This appreciation gives Celie a new understanding of life and her relationship with Albert. Unlike Celie, Shug is a strong woman who defends herself verbally and says what she thinks without fear. When Albert tries to win Shug back, Celie reports how Shug was very mean to him because he initially left her alone when she fell sick: "***Turn loose my goddam hand, she say to Mr. _____. What the matter with you, you crazy? I don't need no weak little boy can't say no to his daddy***" (CP: 31). When Shug is healed, she sings a song which was inspired by Celie. Fifer assumes that by helping Shug in writing a song, Celie steps out of the feminist language to actual and useful work. Shug's advice opens Celie's eyes to things she could not perceive before and changes her language bringing her closer to the conscious woman she eventually becomes.

When Celie starts making pants she first uses the stiff material of an old army uniform, then she moves to soft materials. Shug's creative mind and courage give Celie the audacity to raise the prices of her pants and even establish a factory with employees. Fifer speaks zealously of Shug's role in Celie's life: "***Shug's audacity and Celie's skills unite as Shug "sings out" on optimism, faith, and energy. She has***

enough vision for two lives and her energy buoys Celie”(Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick:162). The conversations that Celie has with Shug create much of her future life decisions and visions. Celie accepts the wisdom of Shug and makes it part of her life. Shug’s character is the opposite of Celie which the latter uses to compare and contrast in order to see the truth. Celie remembers her former self and says: “ *Now that my eyes opening, I feel like a fool*” (CP:114). Fifer discusses the effects of this relationship on each one of them: “*Each woman relives her past and recreates her future for the other. In the process they relieve each other of guilt and supply each other with enabling language; Shug expiates her cruel treatment of Annie Julia and Celie forgives herself for submitting to her stepfather*” (Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick:162).

Conclusion

We have undertaken in the previous chapter an investigation based first on Walker's general tendencies and concerns, and then we moved to more specific analyses of the female characters in *The Color Purple*, notably Celie. The theme of the black woman's voice seems to be persistent in Walker's fiction as seen in other novels like *Meridian* who travels physically and spiritually to define her wholeness. In the same fashion, *The Color Purple* traces the life of a young woman who builds up the strength to defy the social male-dominated norms that entombed her alive.

In the mirror scene of the novel, Celie makes her first encounter with her own body. Lacan suggests that coming to terms with ones' own body is the first step towards shaping a comprehensive image of oneself. Therefore, Shug's motivation to make Celie look at herself in the mirror is the first real incentive that moved Celie's desire for selfhood. The narcissistic friendship, as explained by Freudian psychoanalytic studies, that brought Shug and Celie together and developed into an intimate romance, is another main contributor to Celie's growth as she experiences the feeling of being loved and appreciated for the first time in her life.

The epistolary form of the novel is probably the main feature in this fictional work. Alice Walker created a correspondence that was initially ironic in two instances bringing the reader closer to the plight of Celie. The letters represent windows through which the reader learns about the life of Celie and the other characters. Through the epistolary form, Walker allows her protagonist a wider space for self expression as a narrative present and a narrative past as Schwartz suggests. This skillful narrative technique allows the reader a vast variety of details and a deep insight into the world of Celie as she reports, reshapes, filters, and reconsiders her life.

Chapter four:

Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker: The Common Bond

Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker have always been considered literary mother and daughter. Critics believe that Walker's primary literary influence was Hurston's unique dramatizations of the African American life, notably in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In this chapter we will look critically at the matrilineage and influence which exist between these two writers. We will consider closely the anxieties of the literary daughter and the intertextual relationships in Hurston's and Walker's texts. In this context, analyses of some passages from Alice Walker's *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* will provide insight into the issue of the artist's need of a model.

In demonstrating the close literary relationships between these two writers we found it important to discuss Walker's excavation and resurrection of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by putting it back on the shelves and also by rewriting it in her own texts notably *The Color Purple*. We will demonstrate how the rebellious personality of Hurston influenced the ideology of Walker when she created the concept of "womanism" which critics believe is more or less the result of Walker's fascination with her literary mother.

The last part of this chapter will be devoted to landscape and storytelling and the struggle for voice and self-possession in the *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Thus, the concept of landscape will be taken as a sample of the myriad of similarities between these two novels to show the extent to which these two writers are related literarily and ideologically.

I. Matrilineage and Literary influence:

In her collection of essays *"In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose"* Alice Walker wrote: ***"We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. And if they are thrown away, it is our duty as artists and witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children, and, if necessary, bone by bone"*** (In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: 92). In this well known quotation Walker claims rediscovering Hurston' work when she was doing a research about voodoo. In this book Walker tells her readers how she literally tried to recollect Hurston bone by bone. She visited her burial place and marked her grave. Diane Sadoff argues in her book *"Black Matrilineage: The Case of Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston"* that Walker's celebration of Huston's work is filled with anxiety. She notes that the quotation mentioned above is full of anxious questions: Will Walker's work defeat the odds and survive? Will somebody recollect her work if it is buried? What are the forces that entombed Hurston's works and are they still present? Sadoff suggests that Walker needed a literary foremother to find her own identity as a writer and to validate her work: ***"She virtually invents Hurston before she defines herself as indebted to Hurston's example"***(Sadoff in Lauret: 15). Walker's anxiety of loss is evident and by saving Hurston's legacy and memory she was unconsciously safeguarding her own. Therefore, Hurston is not only a foremother for walker, but also a model and a legitimating presence for Walker in the African American literary tradition.

For Walker, racism in not the only problem, but also sexism and the weakness of the oppressed people to protect each other. Kadiatu Kanneh wrote in her essay *"Mixed Feelings: When My Mother's Garden is unfamiliar"*: ***" Black cultures of resistance as well as black self-recognitions are not always, or ever, simply inherited. Black feminist identities, in order to gain a valid political voice, have repeatedly and contextually to reinvent themselves in dialogue and conflict with racism"***(cited by Lauret:16). Kanneh is interested in the matrilineages which could be lost because of migration or the cultural and political differences between the mother and the child. Kanneh's idea of a constructed rather than a simply inherited matrilineage applies to the relationship between Hurston and Walker. Lauret argues that many critics have written about the similarities between the two writers without actually investigating Walker's main interest in Hurston's work. The similarities

between the two writers are ostensibly the common commitment to Southern folklore and culture especially the vernacular tradition, self-emancipation and the quest for selfhood as in Janie's quest in TE and Celie's in CP. The striking similarities found in TE and CP are discussed in numerous critical reviews and a great number of books and articles by critics of different political views and perspectives; yet very few like Henry Louis Gates Jr. looked at the presence of Zora in the other works of Walker.

Many critics argue that Walker is the literary daughter of Hurston, but they maintain that the daughter seems to stray in many instances from the original path of the mother. Michael Cook believes that the two writers share indeed common interests but "*Walker operates on a different pitch and scale*" (16). Lauret notes that Walker identifies this difference in tone as Hurston's lightheartedness and optimistic treatment of the plight of the Southern black woman, as opposed to her own vivid portrayal of the suffering of the black women. In comparing Hurston's prose with Walker's Lauret observes that: "*Walker is honest and serious where Hurston's prose is notoriously slippery and slant and plays tricks on its readers*" (16). Therefore, many critics including Lauret argue that Walker's investments in Hurston's prose is a self-legitimizing matter. They note that many of the common interests and shared features especially in TE and CP are made consciously by Walker. For example, Walker gives Celie the autonomous voice through which we read the story, unlike Janie's lack of self-expression in crucial areas in TE. Another parallel which seems to be made with a conscious choice by Walker is the normal and rather ragged appearance of Celie, as opposed to Janie's remarkable beauty. Lauret thinks that the black folklore and vernacular is what Walker seeks in her literary for mother Hurston. Trudier Harris compared many of Walker's and Hurston's works and concluded that walker's migration from the South and her distance from her roots and traditions and what she tries to undo through Hurston's work. He insists that Hurston and Walker do not occupy the same position in terms of the African American folk culture. In his comparison between the two authors in this area he wrote: "*It is the difference between the intimate knowledge of the culture as usually possessed by the insider, and the acquaintance with the culture as usually possessed by those who are to some extent outsiders*" (17). What Harris meant is that walker used Hurston to get back to her southern roots which she lost with her distance and migration. In Walkers *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*, she expresses her deep

appreciation at discovering *Mules and Men*, she says in the book: ***“When I read Mules and Men I was delighted. Here was the perfect book!”*** (84). Walker’s delight in this book might be due to the fact that another black woman writer privately recorded an account of southern black culture. So, Walker was to a great extent happy because Hurston’s book was in a way legitimizing and providing roots for her own work. Walker’s interest in Hurston was not only traced by the legitimization that Hurston provides to her fiction, but by the bridge represented by Hurston which reconnects Walker, a then middle class mother, with the life of the southern black woman with its simplicity and labor. Walker’s preoccupation with returning to the south is not personal in her part, because she shares this interest with many other black artists and students who made the same migration to the north for the sake of educational opportunities and success.

In addition to the similarity in the black woman’s quest for selfhood and liberation, the vernacular is a notable intertextual trait in TE and CP. In an interview in 1984, Walker spoke about the use of the vernacular as a means of recovering the southern cultural traditions. She said:

“This was the way my grandparents spoke, this is the way my mother speaks today and I wanted to capture that. Especially for my daughter, who has a very different kind of upbringing and who doesn’t get to Georgia very often. I want her to know when she grows up what her grandparents, her great-grandparents sounded like, because the sound is so amazingly alive.”

(18)

The same vernacular was used by Hurston in TE probably for the same objective of preserving the sound of the great-grandparents. Walker said that Hurston found poetry in places where many people of her time saw disfunctional English. Therefore, Hurston is the link which binds Walker’s family heritage, her public activism of anthropology and literary tradition in one solid unit. The discovery of Hurston’s work, especially TE, makes it possible for Walker to function as a social activist and as teacher and writer without losing the authentic southern touch. In

addition, Lauret assumes that Hurston's example enables Walker to articulate her critique of race and gender relations in the feminist post-Civil Rights era and to theorize it in the concept of womanism. In Walker's *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* she puts forward a revision of a largely white feminist ideology. In this book she coins a new approach to women's writings with her "womanism". Walker's own definition of a womanist seems to be a vivid description of Hurston:

"Womanist 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish", i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "you trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious."

(In Search: xi)

According to Lauret, the first characteristics of a womanist as explained by Walker do three things. First, they invoke the speech of the black folk that Hurston freed from disregard and underestimation as a failure to cope with good and standard English. Second, it depicts a feminine way of behaving that Hurston's life style and behavior fits perfectly. In fact, Hurston's way of living incompatible and even antithetical of Walker's and contrasts white feminism. Third, the mention of girlishness is reminiscent of the feminist critique in the 1970s which maintained that the feminists' sense of their own oppression is like the cry of little girl. The critique appeals to Truth who maintained that middle class white women might disapprove the passivity of women and protest to gain their rights to paid employment and

reproductive freedom. However, Walker, similar to her foremother Truth, feels that middle class white women should not left in their ignorance of the active, hard working lives that the majority of American women black or white undergo.

The second part of Walkers definition reads:

"2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and /or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist. "

(xi)

This section continues the criticism of 1970s feminism. It draws both on Hurston's view of the diversity of the African Americans and on the way white radical feminism valorized women bonds and women's culture. This section also revises radical feminists' separatist thoughts. Hurston is known for her opposition of the desegregation of schools in the 1950s. She believed that an individual's racial health is best ensured by separate education –like her own upbringing in an all black town. Feminist separatists of the 1970s believed that heterosexuality and feminism going opposite directions, because loving a man is like “sleeping with the enemy”. Walker disagrees with the feminist separatism as an ideology. However, she still left the space for women's autonomy. This choice is similar to Hurston's view that such a choice should be made freely by the woman herself based on her individual experiences. Walker insists that black women has always been revolutionaries and have a long and bitter history of struggle against oppression, racism and sexism. Black women, Walker adds, have always been aware of the diversity of women's cause. Diversity, here, refers to the different colors and intellectual affiliations of women who share the same cause of liberating women from patriarchy. Walker asserts in her definition of a womanist that black women are committed to their race and gender rather than their

biological looks. Walker also maintains in her definition that the womanist cherishes what the black culture has to offer. The womanist loves music. The womanist is a person who has a sensuality that integrates political identity into everyday life. The womanist is active and positive rather than defined by a victim status. Hurston's mark is seen again in this section as a model of a womanist. She was known for her love of the blues and her preference of individual action over collective activism. Walker ends her definition as follows: "womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender". This last part of the definition is quite controversial. Critics like Turyline Jita Allen believe that this line is divisive. She said: "*Walker sets up black womanism and white feminism in a binary opposition from which the former emerges as a privileged, original term and the latter, a devalued, pale replica*" (cited by Lauret: 20). Lauret disagrees with Allen's assessment of this line and thinks instead that Alice Walker took lavender and intensified it with black to deepen it. In this fashion, Walker does not refuse white feminism all together but absorbs it into her project and changes it to the point of no return. Thus, Hurston provided Walker with the example she needed to formulate her critique and radicalization of the white feminist ideology.

Bloom discussed the "anxiety" that Walker felt towards Hurston differently from Lauret's view. In his editor's note to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, he wrote that Walker went through an "*agnostic struggle with the influence upon her of Zora Neale Hurston*" (Bloom, 2008: vii). He notes Walker's assertion that no anxiety exists in literary relations between African American women writers. She disagrees with Bloom and insists that African American authors are in deep amiable agreement that they differ only in emphasis not in the way they judged the common issues they addressed in their fiction.

Bloom notes how Alice Walker and other critics tend to idealize the relationships between black women writers and women writers in general. He refers to the feminist ideology which holds that, competition, rivalry, creative envy, and the race to the highest place among writers, are all masculine tendencies and male anxieties. He adds: "*Either women do not beware other women and never compete with one another (or with their mothers), or else human nature is so purified by feminist discourse that all agnostic elements in literature subside*" (01). Bloom insists that Alice Walker as an author of CP is very much of a novelistic daughter to Hurston. To him, Celie is a very clear revision of Hurston's Janie. Therefore Bloom

presents the problematic of what is added to the representation of the character when the reader rereads Hurston in Walker's work. Bloom summarizes the influence of Hurston on Walker as follows:

"The Color Purple[...] closely follows Their Eyes Were Watching God by giving us a heroine who has lived more than one revisionist moment in regard to her cultural context. If you repeat that moment, as Walker consciously did, then your imaginative gesture will not be one of origination. Hurston who was anything but an ideologue, who was neither a feminist nor an African American nationalist wrote with the freedom of an original. Shadowed always by Hurston's achievement, Walker has shifted the agnostic ground to issues of feminism and political liberation, but at the high cost (at least for me) of speaking in a voice never altogether her own, the voice of Hurston's Janie."

(02)

II. Walker's Discovery of Hurston: Excavation and Resurrection of Their Eyes Were Watching God:

When Walker discovered the unmarked grave of Hurston, a new page of the African American women's literary tradition was written. Walker describes how she found Hurston's grave in her well known account in Ms. Magazine. She went to Eatonville with a companion and talked to Hurston's former neighbors. They found their way to an abandoned cemetery in Fort Pierce, Florida. Following the directions of the undertaker and in a field of waist-high grass, Walker found the grave and marked it with a tombstone which reads "*Zora Neale Hurston, A Genius from the South, Novelist, Folklorist, Anthropologist, 1901-1960*". Dixon says: "***The once forgotten field is now a place of remembrance, a memorial; out of a wilderness, Walker created a garden***" (Dixon: 94).

Walker encountered Hurston's work when she was gathering information for a story about folk culture and rituals. Hurston's two volume anthropological account and the southern cultural elements in her fiction were very inspiring and appealing to Walker. In her essay collection "In Search of our Mothers' Gardens", Walker wrote: "***She had provided, as if she knew I would come wandering in the wilderness, a nearly complete record of her life***" (In Search: 12). The ties which exist between these two writers are very clear starting from the remarkable similarity in the names of their hometowns: Eatonville and Eatonton, to the startling similarities in their texts and authorial strategies. Both women were rebels in their times. Hurston preferred to write about the South and celebrate the black culture, while her contemporaries from the Harlem Renaissance rejected the South and considered it a reminder of slavery and segregation. Similarly, in a time when most of the writers of the Black Arts Movement favored political activism over regional culture, Walker continued to celebrate the South and remind her readers of its beauty and heritage.

Much of the twentieth century writers, according to Perdigao, perform literary excavation, revisiting and revising the themes of the early texts. Walker's texts employ an excavation in their illusions to Hurston's work. Perdigao believes that Walker performs what the critic calls "***entombment-exhumation cycle***" (Perdigao: 127). Walker exhumes the buried work of Hurston from entombment. Similarly,

where Hurston's criticism analyses her work in the sphere of African American identity leading to an eventual entombment, Walker performs a literary excavation that drives toward exhumation, in her plots, characters, themes, and critical practice.

Hurston's TE was widely read in the 1970's when the literary environment was ready to read the text and appreciate it. This period was marked by the establishment of feminist literary criticism and by the emergence of culturally specific forms of evaluation of African American texts which originate from the black tradition of storytelling and discursive practices. Walker saved Hurston's work from the burial attempts by Hurston's contemporaries like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Alain Locke. Walker's successful rescue mission represents contemporary scholarship in African American literature that tries to reinstall the relationship between the materiality of the racially marked body and the function of race as a discursive category, as asserted by Perdigao. *In The Color Purple*, Walker transcends the materiality of race without offering a redemptive narrative of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Perdigao agrees with Gates' views in *The Signifying Monkey* where he uses the term "*speakerly text*" to reflect a narrative strategy that is concerned with the possibilities of representation of the speaking black voice in writing.

When Walker notes Hurston's head "rags" in her essay "*Zora Neale Hurston: a Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View*", she indicates what is at stake in Hurston's TE as Janie recovers her selfhood. In TE, Janie is forced by her husband Jody Starks to wear head rags in order to hide her beautiful hair. Janie rejects the rags because they are a reminder of slavery and bondage, and once Jody is dead she frees herself from the burden of their painful significations. Perdigao notes that: "***By representing the "rags" on Hurston's head, Walker redresses the problem that Janie struggles with as she attempts to define and then reinscribe her body as a result of her newfound understanding***" (132). Similarly, in CP Celie initially rejects the idea of wearing pants, but as a result of Shug's persuasive explanations and Celie's ongoing self-discovery, she finally decides to wear purple pants and even sew them.

Alice Walker called for the excavation and resurrection of Hurston's works which were forsaken for so long. Walker's call for recollecting geniuses bone by bone indicates her awareness of the complexity of the relationship between the body of the

writer's texts and the bodies in the texts. Perdigao suggests that the result of Hurston's dismemberment is the character of Shug Avery whose sensuality, audacity and unconventional ways fit perfectly Hurston's life style. In CP Shug is the lovely shade off purple that adds color and depth to Celie's life. She is the beautiful blues singer who says what she wants and does what she thinks is right. The remarkable similarities between Zora and Shug can be seen clearly in the following passage from "A Cautionary Tale":

"In my mind, Zora Neale Hurston, Billie Holiday, and Bessie Smith form a sort of unholy trinity. Zora belongs in the tradition of black women singers, rather than among "the literati", at least for me. There were the extreme highs and lows of her life, her undaunted pursuit of adventure, passionate emotional and sexual experience, and her love of freedom. Like Billie and Bessie she followed her own road, believed in her own gods, and persued her own dreams"

(In Search: 91).

Perdigao adds that if Hurston's texts are speakerly texts or oral stories, Shug is speech and song.

III. Saving the Life that is your Own: The Importance of the Model for Walker

Alice Walker wrote in her essay "*Saving the Life that is your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life*" about the importance of the model for the artist. For her, the writer who lacks models confronts deadly hazards. The model enriches one's view of the world and art is best appreciated in a larger perspective. The connections that the artist tries to make depend on a common thread that unifies with enormous diversity the search that stretches from the inside to the outside worlds. Walker expresses her great admiration of Hurston's work in the same essay:

"Condemned to a desert island for life, with an allotment of ten books to see me through, I would choose, unhesitatingly, two of Zora's: Mules and Men, because I would need to be able to pass on to younger generations the life of American blacks as legend and myth, and Their Eyes Were Watching God, because I would want to enjoy myself while identifying with the black heroine, Janie Crawford, as she acted out many roles in a variety of settings, and functioned (with spectacular results!) in romantic and sensual love. There is no book more important to me than this one."

(In Search: 86)

As a student, Walker was not introduced to books which would have urged adventure and experience in her. She was rather directed to read a collection of books written by white male writers who: "*...thought most women worthless if they did not enjoy bullfighting or had not volunteered for trenches in World War I*" (In Search: 06). However, she loved those books and considered them indispensable for her growth. She found the perfect model in the character of Janie and chose her wisdom to be as necessary as air and water.

IV.Landscape and storytelling and the struggle for voice and self-possession in the The Color Purple and Their Eyes Were Watching God:

The images of place and landscape explored by female African-American writers have overturned the male aesthetics of subterranean worlds depicted in the texts of Ellison and Wright. Alice Walker offers a “womanist” view of the woman’s place in the society shared by her foremother Hurston who also adopted a womanist stance, though not yet coined in her time. Both Walker and Hurston have used the geographical setting to chart the journeys of struggle of their protagonists.

Hurston takes the reader to the adventure of Janie to the muck of the Florida Everglades which secures her a place in the society she will go back to. Walker shaped her novel “*The Color Purple*” on the grounds of oppression and geographical distance where Celie is in the south of America and Nettie in the wild ancestral lands of Africa. Walker and Hurston encouraged the performance of new identities and the shaping of fresh perspectives of life and selfhood in new spaces. For Hurston, it was the front porch where Janie told her story to Phoebe and took her to the adventures of the Everglades. Walker chose the petunia gardens of the beautiful and sensual color purple which mesmerized Shug’s imagination.

Melvin Dixon believes that striking similarities in the bodies of *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* can be seen. In TE, Janie recounts her adventures to Phoebe who, in the course of the novel, gains new perspectives of evaluating what happens in her society. Here, Phoebe is the static receiver of fresh ideas while Janie is the adventurer who made the active choice of travelling and taking risks. Change occurs in the personalities of the two women, directly or indirectly. Janie’s self-perception is affected directly by her direct experiences of movement and marriages, while Phoebe’s change is a result of her listening and indirect experience of Janie’s story. Therefore, unlike Janie’s journey of self-discovery which is both physical and spiritual, Phoebe experiences a spiritual connection with Janie which allows her to change and gain her selfhood. Nettie in CP travels to the new landscape of Africa where she discovers traditions, rituals and beliefs of her ancestors. Nettie’s years in Africa change her directly as she is actively involved in the action and participate in the change which occurs in Celie’s personality by reading Nettie’s letters. Celie, like Phoebe, is the static receiver who learns about her estranged sister’s life and

adventures through reading. The act of reading represents an indirect involvement of Celie in Nettie's long trip to Africa. After this involvement Celie is a forever after changed woman with new perspectives and ideals to carry on her life with.

Therefore, the setting becomes an efficient element in the fiction of black women in shaping their protagonists' quest for freedom, Dixon says: "*the settings become finely honed landscapes as they audaciously and outrageously pull readers up from the underground and toward a new geographical idiom*" (Dixon: 84). Alice Walker's garden or "mother's garden" is a simple landscape that she used to explore the magnificent possibilities that women can find if they decide to look for ways of making their lives brighter and more colorful, she says:

I remember people coming to my mother's yard to be given cuttings from her flowers; I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden. A garden so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity that to this day people drive by our house in Georgia –perfect strangers and imperfect strangers- and ask to stand and walk among my mother's art.

(Walker cited by Dixon: 84)

Zora Neale Hurston was a great lover of flowers and a good gardener, so the garden that walker praises in the passage above is the literary garden and artistic heritage that Hurston left for her daughters to enjoy and learn from.

Huston began to write during the Harlem Renaissance but her work was not exactly the type of fiction expected from a Harlem Renaissance writer. She was fascinated by the black folk life and found the ingredients she needed for her writings in the "lowlife". Janie Crawford in TE takes her chances and travels to the muck of the Everglades, a low challenging area in which she found her voice and autonomy. So, instead of sinking and dying, Janie succeeded to stay alive and not only survive but come out of her experiences a new and strong woman who is changed and able of

changing. Dixon believes that Hurston's concern with spatial relations and the prevailing erroneous assumptions about social class allowed her to "*give compelling expression to relations between geography and identity*" (84).

The main concern of Hurston was the depiction of life in Eatonville, the all-black town where she lived and chose to create most of her stories. Hurston's preference of mobility is not only seen in TE, but also in her novel *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1946), as can be inferred from the title. Dixon assumes that Hurston focuses on geography and space and their impact on personal growth. Hurston's strong connection with the South and her rootedness generated controversy among her contemporaries who rejected the South for its racism and considered it a source of paralysis and stagnancy. She was among the few who wanted to celebrate the flourishing southern culture and traditions. This fact as well as Hurston's outrageous womanist behavior were among the reasons which endeared Hurston to Walker who was also born in the Southern state of Florida. Dixon says that Alice Walker: "... discovered a fellow writer and "homegirl". This notion of passing on an artistic and geographical legacy has its roots in Hurston's best novel" (85).

TE is the story of Janie who grows to maturity out of her multiple marriages. Janie's storytelling to Phoebe establishes the novel's inner traits and outer frame. Janie's account of her adventures does not just provide Phoebe with the details of Janie's experiences, but also with the social and cultural adversity she faces because of her newfound freedom. In addition, her storytelling reveals Hurston's spatial metaphors which shaped the development of Janie and the stages of her growth. In this fashion, Hurston takes her protagonist to various spaces and depicts different kinds of wilderness. Nanny's tells her story to Janie early in the novel setting a cultural document or text of movement and facing the wilderness, Nanny says:

*"In de black dark ah wrapped mah baby de best
I knowed how and made it to the swamp by river.
Ah knowed de place was full uh moccasins and
other bitin' snakes. But ah was more skeered uh
whut was behind me. I hide in dere day and
night and suckled the baby every time she start to
cry, for fear somebody might hear her and ah'd*

*git found [...] but nothin' never hurt me 'cause
the Lawd knowed how it was."*

(TE:35)

Dixon thinks that the story of deliverance told by Nanny is reminiscent of the escape episodes of the fugitive slave narratives. By incorporating the old African American narrative motif of escape, Hurston prepares the ground for the contemporary and more spiritual escape in the quest for selfhood of Janie. Nanny's confrontation with nature at its harshest and most dangerous foreshadows Janie's confrontation with nature's fury in the floods that almost took her life if not with the courageous rescue of Tea Cake.

The critic adds that Nanny's dreams were lost when her daughter was raped, became pregnant and surrendered to alcohol and grief. Janie was next in line to make Nanny's dream of a successful and safe woman come true. Janie feels admonished to be better, and although she strays several times in the novel from the track traced for her by Nanny, she is never lost. By the end of the novel Janie learns that her life and Tea Cake's depend on reaching a higher ground, ironically following Nanny's advice and vision after all: "*ah been waitin' a long time, Janie, but nothin' ah been through ain't too much if you just take a stand on high ground lak ah dreamed*" (TE:32). Nanny's advice becomes the kernel of Janie's experience told to Phoebe who will be the heir of the same legacy.

Hurston and Alice posit skillfully two aspects of geography: place and personality. In TE Nanny's desire for land triggers Janie's search for broader landscapes. Her escape from the limited space of Eatonville to the wider spaces of the Everglades offered Janie a solid and valuable ground to build her autonomy. Nanny's idea of classes as divided between high and low is also defied by Janie who prefers to travel between the two instead of being trapped in one place. Nanny believes that classes are irreconcilable arcs and that the black people are "*branches without roots*" (TE: 31). With the character of Nanny, Hurston emphasizes the threat of incompleteness and indeterminacy that prevail in the black community. Unlike Nanny Janie represents the idea of looking at things with an eye of open possibilities. Janie's adventurous attitude is evident in her physical travel to new places and social travel from one class to another. Dixon says that : "*Hurston suggests that roads travelled*

fully lead not only from low to high ground, but also can take us, as Janie's road does, from sweltering depths of a culture's swampland to a reconquered, redefined place at home" (Dixon: 87).

The movement from the muck back to the porch marks Janie's return to her homeland as a new woman after her travel. Phoebe's eagerness to listen to Janie's story makes her a perfect recipient of this new identity. Phoebe's "hungry listening" and Janie's ability of storytelling form a solid bond between the two women. This bond is a way of transmitting the free spirit of Janie to Phoebe, and a triumph over the gender-restricted community. Here we can note Walker's use of the bonding of women as a threat to male control and patriarchy in CP, in bonds like the ones we see in the relationships of Celie and Shug, Sofia and Mary Agnes, and Celie and Nettie. Therefore, Phoebe becomes "*Janie's mouthpiece to the less enlightened community gossips, who hold court on their more public front porches*" (87). Now phoebe is the sole repository of Janie's new values and the next woman to take action and move beyond confining spaces.

Similar to Celie in CP who is given the authorial voice to tell her story to her sister Nettie, Janie's storytelling, though less personal than Celie's, does not only affect Phoebe, but also affects the teller herself. Dixon assumes that Janie finds the power to command her house, the approaching dawn and the horizon in ways that men like Kabnis failed to. Janie's house is neat and clean, and she is glowing and alive again: "Soon everything around downstairs was shut and fastened, Janie mounted the stairs with her lamp. The light in her hand was like a spark of sun-stuff washing her face in fire. Her shadow fell behind and headlong down the stairs. Now, in her room, the place tasted fresh again. In her room upstairs, Janie is not lonely because she is joined by the spirit of Tea Cake. In this scene, she mixes love with landscape when she shows her control: "*She pulled in her horizon like a great fishnet[...] Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it on her shoulder*" (TE: 286). Dixon thinks that Janie's gesture "*is due to (her) complete passage through the geography of her cultural past and the hilly terrains in her marriages*" (Dixon:88).

Janie is close to nature, also a feature of Shug in CP, and she observes its beauty in the activity of bees in the pear blossoms in Nanny's yard. Her discovery of

love in nature prepares her to the duality she will experience in her life that love can be uplifting or heartbreaking and that nature can be life preserving or life threatening. Hurston offers significant parallels in the lives of Janie and Nanny. The grandmother experienced the danger of nature during her escape in the woods, and Janie witnesses the fury of nature during the floods. The life threatening encounter with the hurricane alludes to an irony in Hurston's text: the lowlands can also be highlands. Janie comes to this discovery by refusing to listen to Nanny, whose words turn out to be true in the end: "***Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon [...] and pinched it into such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love***" (TE: 138). Dixon notes that after Janie is saved from the floods in the high ground, the horizon is no longer wrapped tightly around her neck to choke her but draped with authority around her shoulders (89).

The voice that Janie loses with Jody is regained in the muck with Tea Cake. In the lowlands and among the poor and ignorant bean pickers, Janie gets to laugh and talk out loud, although the culture of the muck is very close to the culture in Eatonville: "***The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to***". (TE: 200). These skills of social interaction and self-reliance, says Dixon, immerse Janie in the folk culture and prepare her to the harsh test of nature.

Janie and Tea Cake ignore the warnings of nature and find themselves trapped in the midst of the raging storm. With their eyes watching God, they saw houses without roofs and roofs without houses- the houses are Janie's former jail cells. Janie and Tea Cake save each other from sinking in the water and mud but he surrenders to rabies. Janie finds herself obliged to defend herself and kills Tea Cake with her own hands. She lost her companion and love but she gained herself. About her triumphant return to Eatonville Dixon says:

"Janie returns to Eatonville with the black earth on her overalls as proof of her new baptism. By walking past the Eatonville porches and telling Phoebe the story of her recovery, Janie reaches the high ground of self-possession Nanny had

hope for all long. Instead of preaching this sermon, Janie instructs by example, just as Nanny has hinted, things have indeed come around in unexpected ways. "

(Dixon, 94)

Walker's third novel *The Color Purple* uses landscape imagery to describe the passage from a purple bruise to the discovery of the beauty of the color purple in nature in a woman's journey from a nobody to a rebel. In this novel Walker moves away from the public sphere of political activism to the private family life where sexual harassment and gender and racial prejudice prevail. Walker's novel is the only epistolary novel by an African American writer to date. The distance between Celie and Nettie in the wilderness of Liberia within the Olinka people does not undo the oppression of women. Nettie's accounts in her letters show how women in those far lands share the same misfortune of Celie. However, Celie being "pore and black and ugly" is the most estranged and lonely in the novel. Celie makes a journey that is different from Nettie's in Africa, it is a journey within herself as she travels from "*such a low self-esteem to such self-possession that readers find themselves rejoicing with her*" (105).

Dixon notes that the multiple denotations and connotations of "purple" in the novel follow the familiar trend of new terms of Walker. Celie becomes disfigured because of the beating of her stepfather and her husband, and her bruises turn purple and sore. She matures into a woman who wears purple pants with confidence and dignity befitting the beauty she waited for years to find. Purple is the symbol of this transformation, but Walker insists in the novel on this color as a wonder of the creation. Just like Janie, Celie's house is the center of her confinement with the abuse healed on her by her husband, stepfather and stepchildren. In this lonesome wilderness, far removed from any social interactions, Celie loses almost every sense of herself. The opening line shows her reluctance and uncertainty of who she is. Celie is further dehumanized when her children are taken away from her and when she becomes unable to have children. When Celie first hears about the Blues singer Shug Avery, she thinks of her as a queen. She tries to emulate her by buying purple fabric

similar to hers: *“I think what color Shug Avery would wear. She like a queen to me, so I say to Kate, something purple, maybe little red in it too. But us look an look and no purple”* (CP:17). Although Celie has to choose another color, she eventually has the purple fabric and Shug as a friend, confidante, and lover. Celie’s relationship with Shug saves her from a life a loneliness, but before they met, Celie protected herself by connecting herself to nature and to the wilderness by making herself “wood”, Dixon says that: *“Celie wills herself into a state of rigid verticality in order to shield herself from pain[...]as a tree, she merges with the wilderness of unbridled sexuality and brutality”* (Dixon:106). When Albert brings Shug home to be nursed by Celie an instant bond forms between the two remarkably different women. Celie in nature is the neglected blossom which needs to be nurtured, and Shug is the nurturer. Shug makes the connection between Celie and the title of the novel: *“I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it”* (CP: 114). With this notice Shug draws Celie out of her wooden state, and out of the lonely wilderness where she was abandoned for a long time. Shug also notes that even trees need attention and care: *“You ever notice that trees do everything to git attention we do, except walk?”* (CP:114). The words of Shug bring Celie to the realization that she was neglecting the beauty of the creation: *“I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) Not the color purple (where it come from?). not the little wild flowers. Nothing”* (CP: 114).

To help Celie recover, Shug offers her the blues as a means of self-expression. Dixon assumes that if Ralph Ellison is right that the blues is an autobiography expressed lyrically, then Shug’s offer is musical mirror to review her life. The healing process in this relationship goes both ways. Celie nurses Shug back to health, and Shug draws Celie out of her nothingness and self- annihilation, Dixon says: *“Shug helps Celie link her experiences to the larger voice of the culture in the blues”* (Dixon: 107). The blues here is redemptive. Shug’s music redeems Celie in the same way Tea Cake rescues Janie with his blues singing and by taking her to the source of the music in the muck. With the blues, both the submerged culture and the buried identity surface. Nettie, who is thousands of mile away, is not rescued from oppression. In her letters to Celie she reveals how the woman in the Olinka culture is *“nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something”* (CP: 91).

Nettie's freedom comes upon her return to the South and Celie finds freedom upon returning to herself, says Dixon. Therefore, both Walker and Hurston embrace open spaces to achieve kinship, recognition, and selfhood.

Conclusion

By excavating and resurrecting *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Alice Walker did not only bring Hurston's legacy back to life but also found a much needed literary model at a time when she was searching in her mothers' gardens for a validating literary source. This need came from Walker's sense of loss, a loss of roots, after her migration to the North. Therefore, Hurston represented the source of authenticity and truthfulness to the traditions and history of the South. The influence of Hurston is evident in Walker's texts which mirror her ideology and her womanist thinking. Womanism caused a revolution in the way colored women view themselves and the world because it provided a universalist perspective contrary to the separatist ideas of the feminism of the 1970s.

In the light of the womanist ideas, the intertextual similarities in the texts of these two authors surface. Critics agree that Hurston is definitely present in Walker's novels especially *The Color Purple*, but many of them still believe that despite the unquestionable influence of Hurston, Walker operates on a different scale and pitch, as Lauret observed.

Although Walker asserts that no anxiety exists in literary relations between African American women writers, critics like Bloom insist that African American women writers differ only in the emphases not in the manner in which they judge the common issues they address in their literary texts. Thus, Walker's Celie is in one way or another Hurston's Janie, and the common issue of a woman's constant quest for selfhood differs in the two novels only in Walker's agnostic struggle to find a voice that is completely hers away from the influence of Hurston.

General Conclusion

In the present work, we have tried to define briefly the feminist and womanist ideologies and how they affect the literary productions of the African American women writers who explore the theme of the quest for selfhood.

Feminist ideas have existed for centuries, but it was only until the second half of the nineteenth century that black women started to move in search of their rights. In the annual convention of the Women's Rights Movement in Akron Ohio in 1852, Sejourner Truth became the first woman to call attention to the black slave woman. Black women were the most convenient speakers in the issues of equality with man because they labored, worked in fields, and did all the work that required physical strength. It was thanks to courageous and wise women such as Truth that black women's aspirations and hopes were voiced. However, the majority of the women who are active in the contemporary movement of women believe that black women in the early years of their feminist awareness were preoccupied with the cause of slavery not the emancipation of women from patriarchy.

As a result to racial imperialism, white women organized themselves in clubs and organizations like: Women's Christian Temperance Union, Young Women's Christian Association, General Federation of Women's Clubs. However, black women tended to label their gatherings racially such as: The Colored Women's League, National Federation of Afro-American Women, and the National Association for Colored Women. Hence, because of their racial identification, scholars think that black women were interested in their anti-racist struggle. In fact, although scholars believed that the black women's struggle was exclusively racial, black female reform organizations were primarily involved with the women's movement. It was because of the racism of white women and the social apartheid which were exercised in the US that black women chose to focus on their lot rather than all women, but despite the fact that black women were excluded from the organizations of white women, they maintained a belief in the necessity of a unity of black and white women. Although white women tried to make the plight of the black slave synonymous to theirs, there was no way to compare the dehumanization that the slave endured to the oppression that white women suffered. White women militants used the horrors and dehumanization of the female slaves to strengthen their own cause.

The images of the black female character in African American literature have also been an important focus of this research. Until the 1940s, the images of black women have been stereotyped. During the periods of slavery and reconstruction black women in the Southern white literary texts were assigned a role that further nourished submission and loss of selfhood. Here, we are talking about the pattern of “mammy” who was portrayed as fat, enduring, strong, kind, and nurturing. The roles of “mammy” were mainly physical. She was a laborer and she was not afraid of showing the sensuousness that white women feared to show. Therefore, the black woman was used as a surrogate of all the physical functions that the white woman did not have the courage to perform. The second most prominent image of the black woman was the image of the mulatta. Novels like *Clotel* 1850 and *Lola LeRoy* 1892, the first published novel by a black woman, created this heroine who became an enduring image for black women in African American literature for decades. She unveils the dilemma of values that black people faced and represents the forbidden crossing of cultures. The representation of the black woman as a mulatta in the black literary tradition peaked in early twentieth century in Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923), and Nella Larson’s *Passing* (1929).

The stereotypical images of mammy and the mulatta were no longer representative of the black women in modern African American literature and were replaced with new women for the new age. During the period of The Harlem Renaissance black people from the South migrated in great numbers to the urban North in pursuit of prosperity. Black women migrated too, but their social status did not improve as they hoped. Instead of working in fields picking cotton or cleaning the houses of the white masters, the black women worked as domestics, factory laborers, or prostitutes, in other words, black women were at the lowest bottom of the society’s working scale. Black literature had to give up old stereotypes to keep up with the new realities in books like Zora Neale Hurston’s “*Dust Tracks on the Road*” (1942), Ann Petry “*The Street*”(1946), and Richard Wright’s “*Native Son*”(1941).

The difference between feminism and womanism occupied an important space throughout this research work. The aim was to draw a parallel between the two ideologies in order to provide an ideological basis for our analyses of the novels. Briefly speaking, the main difference between feminism and womanism lies not in

the quest but in the quester, as feminism tends to focus on women; whereas womanism represents a universalist non separatist stance.

It was Alice Walker who adapted the term womanism in her book "*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*". Her ideology is apparent in her literary works, notably *The Color Purple*. The heroines of Alice Walker represent clearly not only the ways they undergo the struggle but also their power, hope and courage, and the changes that occur in their lives and affect the other women and men. Like Hurston, Walker gives the reader a mystical and spiritual experience of nature. In their works, both women try to establish a strong link between nature, spirituality and identity. In *The Color Purple*, Walker presents the character of Celie. The Freudian classic distinction between the self as a love object and the other as an alternative applies to the psychological and social growth of this character. The (other) in this novel is represented by the character of Shug Avery who plays the role of the narcissistic friend. This narcissistic process of coming to love the ego and the object (other) plays an important role in initiating the search for selfhood and wholeness pursued by Celie throughout the novel. In addition to the role of the narcissistic friendship in initiating and perpetuating the quest, we tried in this research work to trace Celie's growth according to two crucial stages of psychological development in modern psychoanalysis, namely the mirror stage and the narcissistic stage. Walker's epistolary form has been examined as well in the light of her protagonist's growth. As her experiences become more intense and significant, her writing moves from mere reporting of events to psychological analysis and humor. By granting Celie the skill of writing, Walker allowed her to move from the passive role of the observer to the active roles of analyst and filterer, and by the end of the novel to autonomy.

Similarly, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston writes about the quest for selfhood by chronicling the life of the beautiful and aspiring female protagonist Janie. In this novel Hurston writes about the issue of sexual virtue for black women and the discourses that helped to circumscribe it. Similar to Walker's Celie, Hurston insists on making sexual expression part of Janie's quest for experience and self-knowledge. For Celie, friendship and writing or the use of language led to her self-discovery. In Janie's case, Hurston employs heroic vitalism and the power of language to depict her protagonist's quest.

Many critics have looked critically at the common bonds between Walker and Hurston, including Bloom and Schwartz who believe that they share a kinship and a spiritual connection most evident in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple*.

Landscape and storytelling and the struggle for voice and self-possession in the *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are investigated in this research as one of the common features of the quest for selfhood in the two novels. Alice Walker offers a “womanist” view of the woman’s place in the society shared by her foremother Hurston who also adopted a womanist stance, though not yet coined in her time. Both Walker and Hurston have used the geographical setting to chart the journeys of struggle of their protagonists.

As a future prospect, the present study may be used in the field of African American studies for further investigations of the common bonds between black female writers and their shared interests and concerns in order to highlight the specificities and artistic uniqueness of the African American female literary tradition.

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ملخص

زورا نيل هرستن و أليس والكر تعتبران قمتين في الأدب الافروامريكي. وقد كتبتا " عيونهم كانت تتأمل لإله" و " اللون الأرجواني"، الكتابان اللذان يعتبران من أهم الإبداعات في الأدب الأمريكي. الروايتان تحكيان قصتي امرأتين ملونتين تعيشان في المجتمع الأمريكي في بدايات القرن العشرين الذي امتاز بالترفة العنصرية والجنسية. بطلتا القصتين تتطوران جسديا و عاطفيا من خلال وابل من النماذج الاجتماعية. خلال سعيهما لتحقيق المعرفة الذاتية والروحية تتواجهان مع التقاليد الاجتماعية المفروضة عليهما من طرف المجتمع و التي تقلل من شأنيهما و تصغرهما حيث يمكن تشبيه الكتابين لرواية جيمس جويس الشهيرة " صورة الفنان وهو شاب"، غير ان الفنان في هاتين الروايتين هي المرأة السوداء الشابة، في تصويرهما لامرأة ملونة تتطلق في رحلة لاكتشاف الذات و إيجاد صوت لها حتى تتمكن من عيش حياة خاصة بها دون قيود.

بهذا قدمت الكاتبتان منظور جديد قوبل برفض و معارضة من قبل المؤسسة الأدبية الذكورية في زمن هرستن. أما تجارب والكر الأدبية في السبعينات فقد كانت ناجحة في وسط أدبي تتغير معطياته بسرعة، على الرغم من الخلافات حول صورة الثقافة السوداء، وإحياء القوالب النمطية القديمة. فنيا وموضوعيا العملا يشتركان في الخصائص التالية : تجربة النساء غير المتعلمات في المناطق الريفية الجنوبية ولغة الثقافة الشعبية السوداء.

هدفنا من هذه الدراسة إظهار كيفية استعمال الكاتبة السوداء لأعمالها الأدبية من اجل توثيق حياة المرأة السوداء الباحثة عن ذاتها وسط مجتمعا. لذلك ارتأينا انه من الضروري توظيف النقد الموضوعي والنصي.

Résumé

Leurs *Yeux Avaient Regardé le Dieu* et *La Couleur Pourpre* sont écrits par deux sommités de la littérature Afro-Américaine féminine : Zora Neale Hurston et Alice Walker. Les protagonistes dans ces deux livres sont des femmes qui progressent physiquement et émotionnellement à travers une averse de paradigmes sociaux. Durant leur quête de la reconnaissance du soi et le contentement spirituel, elles se sont heurtées avec les valeurs méprisantes imposées par leur quotidien.

Les deux romans ressemblent « *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Black Woman* ». Ils décrivent le processus de sensibilisation d'une femme qui retrouve sa voix et développe le pouvoir de diriger une vie par elle-même. Dans le cas de Hurston, cette perspective fraîche a rencontré l'incompréhension de la part de la littérature masculine. Toutefois, après des décennies les expériences de Walker étaient très réussies dans un climat littéraire qui change rapidement, en dépit des controverses quant à l'image de la culture noire et le ravivage des anciens stéréotypes.

En ce qui concerne les thèmes et les techniques de Hurston et Walker, on observe les similitudes suivantes : l'expérience de la femme ignorante et rurale du Sud de l'Amérique, et la langue de la culture noire.

Notre objectif de cette étude est de montrer essentiellement comment une femme noire écrivaine utilise ces productions littéraires pour raconter l'histoire d'une femme noire qui essaye de trouver la vérité d'elle-même et le monde où elle vit via différentes circonstances et dans différentes cultures. Pour atteindre ce but, il était nécessaire d'employer un criticisme textuel et thématique.